

1590

Sense and Sensitivity

The Philosophy and Practice of English Teaching

J. W. Patrick Creber

Many teachers who are attracted by new creative approaches in English are uneasy about abandoning the old standards. This book presents the education of the imagination and of the emotions as actively conducive to a high level of technical competence. The first section deals with the systematic training of the imagination through the pre-examination years; and the second shows how various technical skills may be related to a creative approach which is a discipline in its own right.

The basic principles are illustrated by repeated and detailed reference to classroom practice with children of widely varying ability, whose own work is extensively quoted. The methods described and the principles they embody have received very significant support from all recent government publications on English. The teacher who is engaged in preparing pupils for the Certificate of Secondary Education will find much relevant material here, but the author shows that many of the same principles and methods apply also to work in the grammar school.

Above all his purpose is to present English as an exciting and fundamental discipline, in which successful method is the reflection of precise aims.

Mr. Creber is Lecturer in Education at the University of Manchester.

1890

Sense and Sensitivity



THE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF ENGLISH TEACHING

Sense and Sensitivity

J. W. Patrick Creber



UNIVERSITY OF LONDON PRESS LTD

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Printed in Great Britain
by Cox & Wyman Ltd.
London, Reading and Fakenham

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To the memory
of
WILLIAM FRANCIS HENRY CREBER
and
FREDERICK ARTHUR HOBART

Preface

I gratefully acknowledge my debt to all those who have helped and encouraged me in the writing of this book. In the first place, I must pay affectionate tribute to the memory of a great educator, Frederick Arthur Hobart, first headmaster of Churchfields School, West Bromwich. Without his inspiring example, personal kindness and wisdom, and active encouragement, this book would never have been conceived, let alone written. Secondly, I owe a considerable debt to Mr Geoffrey Summerfield, for several years my colleague at Churchfields, with whom much of the early work on the book was carried out and who helped particularly with both the ideas and framework of the first chapter.

The other sources of help and encouragement over the past five years are too numerous to name, but I must record my special gratitude to Mr Roy Fisher and also to Mr Richard Mills, whose searching comments on the early drafts were invaluable. In the work of correction and revision, my wife's perceptive criticism also played an important part but her consistent encouragement and her forbearance were more vital still.

August 1965

J.W.P.C.

The imagination is what providence uses in order to get men into reality, into existence, to get them far enough out, or in, or down in existence. And when imagination has helped them as far out as they are meant to go – that is where reality, properly speaking, begins.

—Søren Kierkegaard

Introduction

We must aim at too much, to be assured of doing enough.

J. S. Mill

In the opening pages of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* Forster presents us with the child, Irma, concerned to know more about her mother's journey to the continent.

'And, Granny, when will the old ship get to Italy?' asked Irma.
'"Grandmother", dear; not "Granny",' said Mrs Herriton, giving her a kiss. 'And we say "a boat" or "a steamer", not "a ship". Ships have sails. And Mother won't go all the way by sea. You look at the map of Europe, and you'll see why. Harriet, take her. Go with Aunt Harriet, and she'll show you the map.'

And Mrs Herriton, who seems to owe something to Gradgrind, is only too successful, for soon we read that:

She was getting proud of Irma, who had certainly greatly improved, and could no longer be called that most appalling of things – a vulgar child.¹

The episode is illuminating as a demonstration of the sacrifice of the ingenuous spontaneity and humanity of the child to the demands of good form, decorum and correctness.

The kind of teaching which is apparently envisaged by authors of many textbooks in English often approximates all too closely to this series of negative injunctions and incomprehensible corrections. It is assumed that to be able to pick out pronouns, indirect objects or whatever they may be is a valuable skill, but why this is so is never made clear. The preoccupation of the authors is commonly with *method*. Only rarely do they show themselves aware of the interests of the children: then, amongst the mass of disconnected exercises, there appears a topic for written work that reflects some sense of what is interesting and relevant. For example, the bemused fourth-year boy – after ploughing through comprehension work on printing in the eighteenth century, followed by an exercise in prefixes – finds himself suddenly confronted by an injunction to write about 'Motor-bikes and the speed-craze'. This is in fact a likely topic for such pupils, other things being equal. But other things are not equal. The child who for most of his time is engaged in laborious work, the relevance of which escapes him, may

¹ E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, Penguin Books, p. 7.

not fairly be expected to respond when he is suddenly urged to write from his own vivid experience. If, as is quite likely, the working of meaningless exercises has been his chief occupation, not only during the present year but also during the three previous ones, we should not be surprised to find him so stultified and cramped in his expression and ideas as to be incapable of writing in a fresh and personal way. The whole approach to the subject has encouraged him to pass over vast areas of familiar but interesting experience – to bury it for ever, without realising its significance, without ever having an inkling of its connection with the subject he has been trying, so painfully, to learn.

We cannot, however, accept any such sacrifice – any dichotomy between the interests of the pupil and the interests of the subject. Such a distinction seems to be based on the false premise that the two are mutually exclusive or radically opposed. On the contrary, that method which is of greatest benefit to the child seems to be precisely the method which makes for the greatest vitality and sensitivity of language.

Conversely, that method which seems only too often to stultify the pupil is the very method which also achieves no very apparent linguistic gain.¹

When we insist that the needs of the child and the demands of the subject are not in opposition, the natural corollary of this conviction is that the relationship between language and experience will be ideally, as it was for Clare, a very close one. I would add the rider that language tends to 'go bad' when it is divorced from its inherent functions, which, even in the context of the school curriculum, should include the process of answering the needs of the child and that of meeting the challenges presented by that which is perceived. To examine and to anatomise language in isolation – 'Divide your subject? Why, you pulverize it.'² – is to move in the direction of increasing abstraction. The absurd conclusion of such a tendency is reached when an individual word is considered without reference to either the corresponding experience or the context; as Professor Gurrey insists:

¹ In the words of John Clare, "Those who have made grammar up into a system and cut it into classes and orders as the botanical student does the animal or vegetable creation may be a very fine recreation . . . and may make fashionable scholars but it will never make a good writer it will only serve to puzzle and mislead and awe and intimidate instead of aiding and encouraging him therefore it pays nothing for the study of it. A person may be very clever at cutting out trees and animals on paper but he is nothing as an artist and a person may be very clever at detecting what Mr Mu considers faulty in composition yet in English composition may be a mere cypher himself and one that can do nothing." M.S. 10 Northampton: clearly, from the handwriting, a hastily scribbled note; hence the curious construction of the first sentence.

² *The Notebooks of S. T. Coleridge*, Ed. Kathleen Coburn, Vol. 1, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, section 1508.

A word out of its shell of context has no living function, and its pulpy, sprawling meaning is without a structural pattern of words that would give it a significant shape and purpose.¹

Any discussion of the functions of language must sooner or later take account of another persistent yet misleading distinction – that which is so often made between expression and communication. Many works on language either imply or state explicitly that these two functions are to be found at opposite, if not opposing, ends of the linguistic axis.

But one's growing conviction is that such a distinction is based on a verbal sophistry, and that the two so-called poles are better regarded as complementary aspects of one and the same process. Raymond Williams puts the matter well:

For the individual . . . the struggle is to communicate successfully by describing adequately. . . . Unless the description is adequate, there can be no relevant communication. To think merely of making contact with others, rather than of making contact with this precise experience, is irrelevant and distracting. Genuine communication depends on this absorbed attention to precise description, but, of course, it does not follow that the description is for its own sake; the attention, rather, is a condition of relevant communication.²

In classroom terms, we are being adjured by these writers to eschew an enormous amount of what, to judge from textbooks, ought to be almost our basic diet. It would be interesting, or rather sobering, if some dedicated statistician could be found to analyse the quantity and nature of vocabulary exercises in the average textbook. Perhaps one day someone will write a textbook which recognises that vocabulary cannot usefully be taught by teaching vocabulary. There must be an experience to be communicated and the consideration of words is only useful in reference to such a context. Not only this: the experience, whether the pupil is to 'comprehend' it or communicate it, must be relevant, so that he may feel some urge to explore it or share it with others.

In fairness, it is doubtful whether those who lay out neat series of vocabulary exercises in their books really believe in what they are doing. They are influenced less, one feels, by belief in particular methods than by prevailing conditions and by consumer-demand. It is hardly surprising if the teacher who is unsure of himself is impressed by the preponderance of vocabulary work in nearly all kinds of public examination and consequently feels a need to have similar exercises at hand, so as to give his pupils 'the necessary practice'.

There is surely a confusion here, however. An examination is merely

¹ Professor Gurrey's books are indispensable in any extended consideration of English teaching.

² *The Long Revolution*, Chatto and Windus, 1961.

a test of ability and the vocabulary practice referred to must therefore merely be practice in being tested: it is not teaching.

Unfortunately, from the eleven-plus examination onwards there is a marked tendency to give up teaching in favour of such practice: there are far too many pre-examination English courses that concentrate attention exclusively on 'the word' and neglect the experience of which it is an expression. This leads in turn to the abstracting of language from its proper (i.e. natural) functions, and also to the canvassing of obscurely alien or excessively mature literature, in the misguided belief that its perusal is good for the pupil's vocabulary.

★

... do one thing ... imagine what you're writing about. See it and live it. Don't think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic. Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it.¹

While lip-service is commonly paid to the place of the imagination in English teaching, the possibility of framing our work so as to facilitate the thorough development of this faculty by following a systematic course has not yet been sufficiently explored.

An essential part of the discipline of English teaching should be to make some attempt at a rigorous scrutiny of such a concept as imagination. The main purpose of this book is to outline such a systematic course of imaginative work, and if I begin by drawing on the theory and practice of poets and novelists to illustrate the argument, a partial justification for this must be that we are trying to create the conditions in the classroom where our pupils *can be* poets and novelists, *in posse* if not *in esse*, just as, in the laboratory, they are chemists or botanists or entomologists.

The sequence which the method follows represents one possible attempt to achieve a correspondence between the progressive demands made of a child on the one hand, and the readiness of the child to meet those demands on the other. The problem of maintaining some correspondence between the child and the material that is offered to him is a recurrent one. I have tried to solve it by deliberately utilising the characteristic interests and enthusiasms of the child at succeeding stages of his or her development. Such stages, of course, are approximate and theoretical, but it is helpful to think in these terms, and the scheme has proved itself closer to the habits and ideas of the children than have

¹ Ted Hughes, *Capturing Animals*, a broadcast to schools reprinted in the B.B.C. pamphlet *Listening and Writing*, Autumn 1961.

many run-of-the-mill textbooks, with their often speciously 'logical' progressions.

Such textbooks only too clearly remind one of Edmond Holmes' contention that education too often treats children as if they were domestic animals. Such animals, he observes, are

amenable to the dogmatic pressures of those who control their destinies; and the result of this is that their lives, like the lives of 'well trained' children, are not their own.¹

Yet we need not follow the example of Mrs Herriton: English teaching can go some way towards ensuring that the life of the child is its own; that what it writes shall be the outcome of its own perception and imagination, rather than an exercise written to order.



We start, then, in the first year of secondary school, with the child's world of experience – and experience of the world – through sensation. Ted Hughes, in the illuminating broadcast to schools already referred to,² elaborated the parallel between the young boy's capture of an animal and the poet's 'capture' of an experience. Auden, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, spoke of a poem as that which 'pays homage to a sacred object',³ a definition which parallels that of Raymond Williams, who argues that

the purpose of the skill [i.e. the art] is similar to the purpose of all general human skills of communication: the transmission of valued experience.⁴

The scope of the child's expression, the limits of our demands, will be determined, then, by the field of his 'valued experience'.

On the other hand we must recognise that the limits of our demands are determined not only by this, but also by the nature of the language at his command. In order to use that language effectively he must, like T. S. Eliot, engage in the 'intolerable wrestle with words and their meanings', and part of our task is to encourage him to do so. We must, however, be very much aware of the danger of making demands of words which they seem ill-suited to meet. Thus Coleridge:

The Head of Glen Nevish how simple for a Painter/ and in how many words and how laboriously, in what dim similitudes and slow and dragging Circumlocutions must I give it –⁵

¹ Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be*, Constable, 1911.

² See footnote to p. 12.

³ *Making, Knowing and Judging*. Oxford University Press, 1956.

⁴ *The Long Revolution*. Chatto and Windus, 1961.

⁵ *Notebook of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, Vol. 1, Section 1489. See also sections 1495, 902.

The obvious moral here is that landscape-painting is, to a considerable extent, the peculiar province of the painter, but we need not deduce from this that the same holds true for all aspects of the world of the senses. Coleridge's heartfelt exclamation serves to raise the question of the limits of language on a broader front. I would agree that it is wrong to set children (of eleven? twelve? thirteen?) the task of 'rendering all (their) *ideas* distinct and indicable;¹ the complementary problem is to map the range of experience which we *can* legitimately ask such children to render 'distinct and indicable'.

Simply stated, the answer would appear to be within the area of the five senses, and the discipline which I would promote may be described briefly as the discipline of perception or of observation.² The presupposition here is that 'there is something real in the World',³ or, to paraphrase this in the words of Ted Hughes, that 'poems celebrate the pure solidity of (one's) illusion of the world.'⁴

Our work in English, then, is designed not only to help the child enjoy the realness of his world but also, possibly, to offer him an opportunity to give order and form to his sense of this realness. The child must not be taught, however, that this discipline of perception is 'good for him', for this will involve him in an irrelevant, inhibiting and distorting self-consciousness. His concentrated attention must be focused on the object outside himself. Our task is to provide situations in which such concentration can take place and the kind of attention we are advocating is to be seen, for example, as the necessary condition for such observation as gave rise to the following:

On St Herbert's Island I saw a large Spider with most beautiful legs floating in the air on his Back by a single Thread which he was spinning out, and still as he spun, heaving in the air, as if the air beneath were a pavement elastic to his Strokes . . . from the Top of a very high Tree he had spun his Line, at length reached the Bottom, tied his Thread round a piece of Grass and re-ascended, to spin another . . . A net to hang as a fisherman's Sea net hangs in the Sun and Wind to dry.⁵

[Fowey] A cow, drinking from a trough on the hill-side. The netted beams of light played on the wrinkles of her throat. . . .

¹ Coleridge, *op. cit.*, Section 902.

² John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime*, Chatto and Windus, 1954: 'For Wordsworth, Poet meant observer.' Jones goes on to modify this by reference to 'the refining and selective power of memory'. (p. 43.)

³ *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. M. Buxton Forman, Oxford University Press, Third Edition, p. 145.

⁴ *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, September, 1957. Note: Mr Hughes does not claim that *all* poems do, or should do, this; he is, in fact, speaking of his own poems.

⁵ Coleridge, *Notebooks*, section 1598.

July 6th. Went to Land's End by Logan rock, leaden-backed mews wailing on cliff, one with two young ones. Mist. Great yellow flare just before sunset. Funeral. Land's End and Life's End. . . .

[Reflecting on a possible line] 'As the water-lily starts and slides'.

Suggestion: Water lilies in my own pond, seen on a gusty day with my own eyes. They did start and slide in the sudden puffs of wind till caught and stayed by the tether of their own stalks. . . .¹

What a beautiful Thing Urine is, in a Pot, brown yellow, transpicuous, the Image, diamond shaped . . . of the Candle in it, especially, as it now appeared, I having emptied the Snuffers into it, and the Snuff floating about, and painting all-shaped Shadows on the Bottom.²

Almost think you can hear the lisp of the swallow's wings. . . .

Cowslips capriciously colouring meadows in creamy drifts. . . .

In one place over a smooth table of rock came slipping down a blade of water looking like and as evenly crisped as fruitnets let drop and falling slack.³

The bias of the argument should now be clear. The child, by keeping his eyes 'greatly open', extends and improves his knowledge of the world and, furthermore, the attainment of this deeper and wider imaginative insight is in itself an enjoyable process for him. The foregoing quotations are evidence of what William James described as

the intense interest that life can assume when brought down to the non-thinking level, the level of pure sensorial perception . . .⁴

Of course, in our work with children in the first and second year of the secondary school other kinds of consciousness will be involved, but this intense interest and this type of perception are specially accessible and beneficial to both themselves and their use of language at this stage in their development. We, as adults, find it only too easy to live in a world of stereotypes, of the dulled and the dimmed: we find it difficult to sustain the discipline of perception and observation, but the effort must be made 'To cleanse the doors of perception'⁵ and, as D. H. Lawrence suggested, 'discover a new world within the known world'.

In all this, it would be wrong not to acknowledge that I am merely working in the line of the infant and nursery pioneers of fifty years

¹ Tennyson's notebook, quoted in *Alfred Lord Tennyson, a Memoir by his Son*, Hallam Tennyson, Macmillan, pp. 391, 229 and 215.

² Coleridge, *op. cit.*, section 1766.

³ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Notebooks and Papers*, ed. Humphry House, Oxford University Press, 1937. In his Clark Lectures Humphry House pointed out the remarkable similarity between the notebooks of Hopkins and those of Coleridge.

⁴ William James, *On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings*, in *Selected Papers on Philosophy*, Everyman's Library, 1947.

⁵ *The Letters of John Keats*, in the edition by M. Buxton Forman; Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 155.

ago, whose work is now reasonably well accepted. Experience of children in junior school shows that, at some time between the ages of eight and eleven, most of them extend their awareness in the world as perceived through the senses, and become closely interested in the careful observation of, for example, animal life, an interest which often persists well into adolescence. But though sense-training is often done – and well done – in primary schools nowadays, it tends to be dropped as the eleven-plus examination approaches. One of the most serious criticisms of the secondary school must be that often it is never seriously taken up again.

The observation of animal life and the reading of poetry on this area of experience are both peculiarly relevant to the scheme of work I shall be outlining, since they involve a close attention to sensory detail, and they have the further advantage that they help the child to objectify many of his emotions. In the desolation of the lost or deprived animal, in the trials and tribulations of the creature, the children find reassuring reflections of their own. The peculiar merit of the good animal-poem, say John Clare's *The Badger*, is not that it conveys information about natural history to the child, but that it is concerned with one of the child's own archetypal experiences – in the case of Clare's poem, the martyrdom of the creature which is harried and bullied.

★

Imagination . . . the power by which one human being enters into the mind and circumstances of another.

J. S. Mill

As the child moves into his teens a perceptible change of interest takes place so that, if the experience of writing and reading is to continue to answer his needs, there must be a corresponding re-orientation, a change of emphasis, in the syllabus.

The generalised evidence of such work as Dr Wall's *The Adolescent Child*, the specific testimony of such novels as Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*¹ and Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*¹ and of such autobiographical documents as Richard Wright's *Black Boy*² and *A Young Girl's Diary*³ – all such writings confirm one's own memory and one's observations: for the adolescent, life takes on a new intensity, and this intensity is to be found both in terms of an increase in introspection, on the one hand, and an often obsessive concern with social relationships on the other.

¹ Both available in Penguin editions.

² Ace Books.

³ Published by Unwin Books, with a prefatory letter by Sigmund Freud.

The demands of English should change likewise: without abandoning the discipline of perception and observation one should introduce the human element more and more into the content of the work. Just as the children have become progressively more articulate about sensory experience, so, one hopes, they will grow to an articulateness in matters of emotional and social experience. My first concern, however, is not with articulation but rather with imagination, so that reading is as important a means of fostering the imagination as writing. At this stage, we move on to a new definition of imagination.

Hitherto we have concentrated on the adequate statement of sensory observation, either present to the senses, or imagined, selected, and ordered from remembered experiences. When we are dealing with boys and girls in the third and fourth years, however, we need to extend our definition of the imagination in order to compass aspects of experience which are at once more subtle and more complex than sense impressions by themselves. The work is now seen as having a moral aim, for it is here that one seeks to encourage that involvement in the life of others, generally by means of literature, which is the most important part of English. Not only this, but the imagination has an important part to play in enabling the less intelligent children to grasp truths which, if expressed abstractly, would baffle them.

If we can find the strength to examine some of the more potent presuppositions of boys' comics, of much popular adult entertainment, and of the *mores* of the world which is forming (or malforming) our pupils, we are immediately struck by the prevalence of stereotypes, of clichés, of *idées reçues*. In the ethos of boys' comics, both the Japanese and the Chinese (since the Korean War) are presented as sub-human monsters; the image of the adult (in itself the term is often used as a stereotype) in girls' comics is of a 'square', someone who 'doesn't understand' and who is not prepared to try to understand.¹ In another context, when children in a Black Country secondary modern school were asked to explain the term 'Black Country' their answer – 'Because there's so many blacks living here' – was a faithful echo of parental prejudice.

Even the teacher may not be immune to influences of this kind. Too often, one feels, his attitude to his vocation is based on ideas that have never been properly examined, concepts such as 'dignity', 'aloofness', 'the stiff upper lip'. For him, as for many adults today, much of what Forster wrote in 1920, in his *Notes on the English Character*, seems still to

¹ In this connection, see Miss P. M. Pickard's *I Could a Tale Unfold*, Tavistock Publications, 1961.

apply. One is reminded so often of his comments on the formative influences of the public school, whose pupils

go forth into a world that is not entirely composed of public-school men or even of Anglo-Saxons, but of men who are as various as the sands of the sea; into a world of whose richness and subtlety they have no conception. They go forth into it with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts. . . . An undeveloped heart – not a cold one. . . . For it is not that the Englishman can't feel – it is that he is afraid to feel.¹

We are fortunate in teaching adolescents, because their prejudices have not yet become incorrigibly ossified. Their attitudes are still in a state of flux and their *idées reçues* have not yet become *idées fixes*. So we are aiming, whilst our pupils' minds are still open, to help the development of their imagination, which is, as Mill claims,

the faculty by which one mind understands a mind different from itself, and throws itself into the feelings of that other mind.²

Mill is so eloquent on this point, central to the argument, that I make no apology for quoting him at length:

The imagination is . . . that which enables us, by a voluntary effort, to conceive the absent as if it were present, the imaginary as if it were real, and to clothe it in the feelings which, if it were indeed real, it would bring along with it. This is the power by which one human being enters into the mind and circumstances of another.³

We must aim to promote this power, and, conversely, to help our pupils to resist

the natural tendency of men in all ages to deny or disparage all feelings and mental states of which they have no consciousness in themselves.⁴

Similarly, the experience of literature, particularly when it is exploring and ordering those areas of life on the edge of which the adolescent is tentatively standing, can constitute an important illumination and reassurance.

Many of our pupils live in two worlds as far as literature is concerned; or, rather, they live in one and 'go through the motions' in the other. The first is the world of pop-singers and pulp-magazines, while the second is that of officially sanctioned literature which is, of course, 'very good', but has little or no relevance outside the classroom. This dichotomy often seems to set in at a very early age, precisely because there are no points of contact. Literature, we maintain, can often demonstrate to an adolescent that its deeper feelings are not shameful

¹ *Abinger Harvest*, Edward Arnold, 1953, p. 13.

² *Dissertations and Discussions*, Vol. 1 (Reprinted in Routledge Universal Library, and in F. R. Leavis, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, Chatto and Windus, 1950, p. 60ff.).

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 61–2.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

idiosyncrasies of taste and absurd aberrations from an assumed norm.

Clearly, the relationship between teacher and pupil is a delicate one, calling for tact and discretion; the teacher cannot live the pupil's life for him, cannot legislate for awareness. It is all too easy to fall into the same kind of error as Mrs Herriton. Edward Thomas, in *The Icknield Way*, spoke of the women who lived in the new towns as 'looking as if they were made in the chemists' shops' and criticised George Meredith in the following terms: 'A walk for him is an intellectual thing. He enjoys it, but knows also that it is good for him, body and soul'. We need to recognise that we too as adults have the mark of the chemist's shop on us – we must refrain from transferring it to the child, being, as I suggested earlier, particularly careful not to present to him a discipline of perception as something which is 'good for him'.

When we turn to the discipline of writing, the demands that we make of our pupils are graded with care – graded, that is, in terms of the imaginative effort needed. Hence, they are asked to imagine *themselves* in a particular situation or experiencing a particular emotion, before they are required to project themselves into an alien experience, or to imagine a situation from a different or even opposing viewpoint. Thus, in the final stage, we encourage them to cultivate their capacity for empathy –

the power of projecting one's personality into, and so fully understanding, the object of contemplation.¹

The activity which we wish to promote is that of imaginative projection, which involves in part a projection of one's self, but also calls into play the exploration of others' experiences, others' attitudes, other states of mind. This gain in sympathy through imagination, since it can be measured only in human terms cannot be measured at all, but in a world which is to some extent enslaved by the apparent infallibility of measurement there is all the more reason for its being attempted.



By outlining in the three chapters following a progression from mainly sensory to more complex modes of perception, I am not suggesting that this scheme should be too rigidly followed; a too strict adherence might in fact lead to an inflexibility of approach incompatible with the climate of heightened awareness which it is our aim to create. It is obvious that while we may usefully concentrate, at the

¹ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Cf. William James: 'The spectator's judgment is sure to miss the root of the matter, and to possess no truth'. *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

outset, on the re-creation of visual experience, other senses will also be involved to some extent. Again, the fact that children have reached a fairly advantaged stage – such as that described in Chapter 4 – should not be taken to mean that work involving less complex imaginative processes is no longer relevant or useful.

It is of course not only the age of the child that determines the work to be done, but also his intelligence and technical ability. It may very well happen that secondary modern C-stream children, for example, while able – as far as oral or group work is concerned – to follow the progression outlined, will be a year or more behind where written work is involved.

Nevertheless, provided there is reasonable flexibility, this progression seems doubly valuable: firstly, it is related to observable stages in the normal child's development; and secondly, it provides the teacher with a clear outline within which to work, and with precise targets to shoot at.

Once the outline of the method has been grasped, however, there is everything to be gained by experimentation. I have repeatedly been struck by the fact that, if the teacher has the requisite sympathetic insight into the needs, interests, and abilities of his children, the basic techniques here formulated are capable of all kinds of modification and adjustment, so that in fact the same aims may be achieved with children of a wide range of ability.

If, then, the suggestions of detailed teaching method sometimes appear rather surprisingly specific, it is not because I am asserting that this is the only way but because concrete examples best serve to stimulate experimentation along similar lines.

Part One

The Imaginative Faculty

1890

UNIVERSITY OF WEST BENGAL
Date..... 26.10.05
Page No. 12023



1 – *The First Year: The Rediscovery of the Familiar*

Oh our mistaken teachers! –

It was not a proper regard for words that we need.

But a decent regard for things, those older creatures and more real.

D. J. ENRIGHT, 'Blue Umbrellas' from *Bread rather than Blossoms*, Secker and Warburg.

For several reasons the training of the imagination to recapture visual impressions is a good starting point with children entering the secondary school. In the first place, such children tend to interpret the injunction 'use your imagination' in a purely visual sense. (Admittedly, for some it may be an invitation to indulgence in pure fantasy, but the number who react in this way is smaller than one might expect, and they soon learn what is really required.) Secondly, the visual element is very obviously dominant in our society, particularly in entertainment, and it is through this sense that many of our society's most noxious and insidious appeals are made. Enough has been written – to take a single instance – about advertising to make any lengthy comment superfluous here; one has only to remember the influence of packaging on the sales of foodstuffs and the powerful residual impressions left by picture advertisements.¹

The influence of the visual sense on personality development has also some less obvious effects, however. One often has the feeling, when dealing with fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds, that much adolescent inarticulateness has its roots in a visual incapacity, or at any rate in a blunted sensibility; children appear to grow up without really seeing anything, or to put it more accurately, perhaps, only seeing what they want to see. Thus adolescents are allowed to bury half their experience without ever realising its significance, and perception becomes channelled and stultified, with the cliché a common feature not only of their expression but also, and more seriously, of their mode of thought.

¹ See, for example, Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, Penguin Books.

The child comes to the secondary school, then, prepared by his previous experience and by television to accept our stress on the visual. Moreover, he has not yet lost his childlike interest in the object for its own sake and his sensibility is still fresh and vital. If he has attended a good primary school he will have been actively encouraged to develop this sensibility. These advantages must be exploited before it is too late, before his response to things around him has become stereotyped, devitalised because the vision is no longer peculiarly his own. Thus we may accept, at first, his own assessment of the imaginative faculty and begin to extend his experience by exploring it in visual terms. Since he may already be part-way sophisticated even at this stage, we shall be in a real sense 'rediscovering' aspects of familiar experience while his attitudes are still relatively fluid.

To begin by considering the imagination as a pictorial faculty has a further very important advantage: by limiting ourselves in this way we are enabled to inculcate a standard of judgment which is easily made meaningful to the child – that of *accuracy*.

From the outset we must make sure that the child understands what we require of him when we tell him to 'use his imagination'. There is a tendency for this phrase to be used sporadically by the teacher without there being any opportunity for the child to develop, over a period of time, his understanding of what is involved, namely, a *real mental discipline*. As he assimilates this and as his interest grows accordingly, we shall see in the classroom the beginnings of that climate of heightened awareness – of exciting mental exploration and extension of experience – that is our aim.

In order that the child may recognise and respond readily to the demand being made of him, it is important to be consistent; whether we are dealing with the purely visual aspect of imagination or with more complex sense impressions, our lessons need to have certain stable features. *Of these, the essential element is a short period of intense concentration as a preparation to any written work.* As soon as this is established as a regular and accepted discipline, work begins to improve.

With eleven-year-old children the period of concentration and the length of writing need to be limited; furthermore, such periods should not be too frequent – once weekly or even fortnightly will be sufficient. They should be given at times when the children are relatively fresh; the last period of the day is not suitable for any such exacting discipline. The work will at all times be judged on intensity, not quantity. In order to focus attention on the primary need for accuracy, on the re-discovery of the familiar, the subjects themselves will be restricted in

scope, though the degree of this limitation depends very much on the ability, character, and mood of the class concerned, some being able to respond to the challenge of a very limited subject and others unable to do so.

It is often helpful to begin work of this kind by setting an exercise deliberately calculated, by its extended range, to lead to the dissipation of concentration and the general vagueness we particularly desire to attack. Such a topic (with some classes) might be 'A rainy day at school'. I say 'with some classes' since children are unpredictable, but one would expect the response to such a subject to be very unequal and probably largely narrative, interspersed with a few vague sense impressions couched in either stereotyped or 'impressive' language.

The problem of concreteness, of accuracy over detail, having thus been raised, we have to lead the children to discover just how much there is to say about familiar objects and experiences. If they have written, as suggested above, on a wide, unprepared subject, they may now be made to relax, then concentrate on a single or more limited aspect of the original topic, viz. 'Going to school on a rainy day'. If it is left there they are likely to be baffled. In all exercises of this kind – at any rate for the first couple of terms – the teacher should prompt them not by suggestion but by shrewd questioning, pausing after each question,¹ leading the children to re-create in their minds all the details of familiar scenes and experiences and to bring them into sharper focus:

Why did you wake up? Was it raining then? How do you know? Was the window open? Did you look out? (Even here there is, of course, some suggestion, which merely illustrates how much care is needed if we are to elicit a genuinely individual response.)

During the first few weeks, especially, the teacher will learn much by studying the faces of the children as he questions them; he will thus be able to gauge the relevance of his questions – sometimes, for instance, a child who has obviously been at sea will have his imagination fired by some very ordinary question and his whole physical attitude will change. It is in this way that the teacher may learn whether the class can respond to a severely limited subject, e.g. 'Raindrops on the window pane' or 'Water in the gutter'. Though, generally speaking, the ability to respond to this more exacting type of subject is more

¹ Occasionally the same basic method of preparation may be used for oral or group composition, in which case the children will reply aloud to these questions. In the present context, however, the teacher's questions are not intended to produce an oral response, since what one child suggests may interrupt the thought of another. Furthermore, any oral response at this stage dissipates the pressure which the questions are designed to build up – a pressure that is essential to the involvement we seek to promote.

marked in abler children, it is impossible to generalise; the teacher must find out for himself what demands he can make of his class.

Often the first attempt at work of this kind will have been made easier by a discussion of the results of the previous, unguided, piece of writing. The children's first efforts on the subject, 'A rainy day at school', though unequal, may well have revealed here and there flashes of the kind of perception and recording we wish to encourage.

Thus a girl who wrote:

It was pouring it down when I got outside, and I began to wish I had put my raincoat on, but it was too late now . . .

followed this by a reference to 'people passing with hunched shoulders and raincoats pulled round their necks'.

By making such a child conscious of the superiority of this detail over the part previously quoted, we ensure that the concept of 'accuracy' gradually becomes meaningful. It is therefore particularly necessary that our marking should place most stress on encouragement, on making the child notice that word or phrase or paragraph where the recording was most sensitive.

According to the scope indicated by the title and the ability of the children, the class will be expected to write for up to half an hour. It is probably inadvisable to prolong it, at this stage, if the children are to carry over into their writing the intense concentration of the preparatory period.

One of the main initial causes of vagueness is the children's tendency to generalise. They have to learn that the attention to a particular object or experience is the essence of what we mean by accuracy. Once again their work will soon provide clear examples; this boy, after proper imaginative preparation, began his account of 'Christmas Morning' as follows:

When I wake up on Christmas Morning I get a strange feeling of joy.

It would have been difficult to explain to him the (relative) weakness of this had one not been able to read him the opening of the composition written by a girl in the same class:

As I woke up I heard a rustle and scramble of paper. My eyes opened and their I saw a delighted face [- her sister's -] opening up a large pile of presents.

This is immediate, vivid - a real attempt to grapple with experience. It is not perfect, of course, and if the girl is ready for it we can lead her to see the superiority of the opening sentence compared with the less accurate second one. Nevertheless throughout this work even the weaker children can learn much from such examples.

It may, however, be argued that this training is suited only to children of good ability. Were the value of such exercises to be assessed merely on the quality and quantity of written work produced, the argument might appear well founded, but these are not the only criteria. The essential part of the training is, in fact, the preparation – the training in a mental discipline. With children in, say, the bottom half of a secondary modern school the teacher may be well advised to encourage a purely oral response, after which the class may attempt some writing on their own, may work in groups, or may work with the teacher in a combined effort on the board. Whatever method is at first followed – and there is probably a place for all three approaches – some short bursts of intensive writing should soon become feasible with all children except the most dull. With backward (as opposed to dull) children work of the kind outlined appears particularly valuable.¹

Another, and quite valid, argument may be that good work on subjects like those suggested will contain much more than visual impressions. This is of course true, but what is important is that the main emphasis at this stage shall be on the visual. In our exploration of familiar experience we begin by looking at objects because, firstly, these provide accessible subjects for children's writing and because, secondly, we are concerned with the concept of accuracy, with the idea that the object comes first and the right word can be used only after the object has been properly seen.

Such a discipline appears particularly healthy for children of this age as there is a tendency for the most gifted, verbally, to gain merited praise in the junior school, from which experience they may well go on to infer that the use of impressive words is a proof of good English – an idea we must scotch from the outset.

This is not intended as a criticism of English teaching in the junior school: in a sense it is an inevitable happening, for much of the children's early training must necessarily consist in learning to use new words in a reasonably appropriate way and thus it is right that they should be praised for success in manipulating language. In any case, it is often the verbally gifted child on whom the imaginative training suggested makes the most striking impact.

While the work is at first aimed at developing the pictorial faculty of imagination, however, it is impossible to set an unlimited number of topics which exercise only the child's ability to visualise, and it would in any case be undesirable to prolong such a concentration for more

¹ For further comment on this see pp. 41–43. By 'backward', I mean children of average intelligence but below average attainment; by 'dull', children with I.Q.s of roughly 70–80.

than a few months. For one thing, as the children learn adequately to recapture their experience, the visual becomes inextricably mingled with other sense impressions.

While the training in a habit of imaginative preparation is essential for all work of this kind it is necessary to introduce some variety into the lessons. Hitherto I have only suggested the basic technique: the children sit, relaxed, and concentrate on the topic given, while the teacher stimulates their imagination with well-chosen questions. The element of variety is obtained not by altering the method of preparation, but by using different starting points or stimuli. These can be objects, or phrases or sentences of an evocative kind, but most valuable of all are poetry and pictures. The essential criterion is that the stimulus chosen should be one with which the teacher can make an impact, and he needs himself to be continually exploring new possibilities.

The use of short poems as stimuli has significant advantages. In the first place, it is relatively easy to find, from the many anthologies available, poems which are peculiarly condensed and highly evocative. Secondly, and more important, the introduction of poetry in this way relates it to the rest of the work in English so that it rapidly becomes accepted as part of the everyday order of things, instead of being regarded as rarified or 'sissy'. The latter attitude to poetry does not arise even with adolescents to any marked degree if they have long been accustomed to its introduction at various moments, expected and unexpected.

It is important to note that in the first instance poems are used to provoke a response, rather than as things to admire. The admiration is likely to develop unaided by us, if the poems chosen are sufficiently suited to the child for him to see the poet trying to carry out a task similar to his own, and sometimes he will be able to recognise the measure of the poet's success. It is worth stressing, at this juncture, that the poem is not introduced to the class as a 'poem', and the context of its use is not generally the poetry anthology, a type of book liable to elicit resistance or indifference. While this happens most often with adolescents, it is also true that, as a result of their experience in the junior school, the attitudes of some younger children to poetry in 'poetry books' may have become sufficiently conditioned to impede their spontaneous response to it in the way we must encourage. It is therefore preferable to use poems duplicated on slips of paper, or even written on the blackboard. Another disadvantage of the anthology is that it may encourage distraction – it is very tempting to flip over the page to see what comes next – tempting and fatal to concentration.

Often, where the eleven-year-old's attitude to poetry is reserved, if not hostile, one is tempted to see the result of earlier teaching where the view of poetry may have been too close to that stated by Ian Serraillier in *Poems and Pictures* (Heinemann, 1958):

A good poem should be like an open window. It should look out on a fresh and beautiful world, full of magic and wonder.

The limitations implicit in this may appear little short of disastrous. The child's instinct, as exemplified in the following verse, seems much sounder:

Adam and Eve in the garden
Studying the beauty of Nature;
The devil jumped out of a Brussel sprout
And hit Eve in the eye with a tater.¹

Iona & Peter Opie, *Lore and Language of School Children*, Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 20

At times, with the more academic classes, it is salutary to introduce poems not as a stimulus but as a corrective. To take a specific example, using in this instance a very well-known poem. The class is asked whether they have seen a bat. Many children will say they have and we then ask them to concentrate on the idea for a minute. Then we rephrase the question slightly: 'How many of you have *really* seen a bat?'

Fewer hands will go up. Further questioning, as to why some people did not put up their hands the second time, will bring out clearly the fact that what one sees is not a 'bat' – in the sense that one sees a cow grazing, or a chair – but the movement of something which we know is a bat. 'When was this seen?' The answer will generally bring in the idea of shadows, of twilight, and possibly of the fugitive nature of one's perception of a bat.

They are now ready to read Lawrence's poem,² to see clearly:

 things flying
Between the day and the night;
Swallows with spools of dark thread sewing the shadows together.

Of course, this is not only a corrective exercise; it can form an excellent introduction to a poem, often enabling the children to appreciate writing which would have stumped them had they not first explored for themselves the subject matter of the poem concerned. For academic children who respond well to this kind of exercise, and need

¹ Cf. Keats: 'How beautiful are the retired flowers! how they would lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, "Admire me I am a violet! – dote upon me I am a primrose!"' (*Op. cit.*, p. 96).

² Another use of this particular poem is suggested later in the section on figurative language, see Chapter 6, p. 130.

some technical understanding of figurative language, it may be helpful to use as a follow-up another poem for comparison – for instance, in this case, Ruth Allen's *The Bat* (in the children's anthology *All Day Long*, Oxford University Press). When introducing a poem as a 'corrective' the teacher need not labour the point. Where the response to a given subject has been rather woolly he may simply begin by reading a poem on a similar topic. No attempt is made to point out its superiority; instead, the class are led to formulate their own judgment by questions such as, 'Why did I read that?'; if the answer is 'because it's better', the teacher will go on to ask why this is so. In answering such questions the child's awareness of the virtues of compression and accuracy is deepened, together with his appreciation of the suggestive qualities of poetic language. It may be possible, in the light of what has been discovered, for the children to re-read what they had previously written and see weaknesses that had previously escaped them.

The teacher who is diffident about his ability to use poetry effectively in the ways suggested is well advised to proceed cautiously. He will probably find, however – certainly with academic children – that the response aroused by some short, evocative poems is such that he will be encouraged to persevere. While he is experimenting along these lines, he will find in the use of pictures as stimuli another way of approach, one which has many of the same advantages as poetry, together with some that are peculiarly its own.

As with poetry, the teacher's most suitable material will be that which, while answering the children's needs, experience, and ability, is most enjoyed by him. Pictures need not always be in colour – some really good black and white photographs are excellent (as also may be such things as travel posters). Black and white photographs are particularly useful when one is working for the first time on climatic and, in the wider sense, atmospheric effects: scenes such as slum streets, rain in towns, winter evenings in railway station, foundry or dockyard provide excellent starting points on subjects where colour is relatively unimportant and where the essential things are quality of texture, tone and mood. Photographs of the right type are of course less easy to come by than poems, but if a collection is made over a period of months and, if necessary, the aid of the children is enlisted in forming the collection, this difficulty can be overcome. Ideally, photographs should be at least half-plate size, but smaller ones can be used effectively. All these are best mounted on solid card, to cut down on wear. It need not be a disadvantage for the children to be writing on different subjects, for this gives variety and makes the reading of their work aloud less

monotonous for the others to listen to. It does, however, mean that though they will be able to concentrate on the scene before starting to write, the teacher will be unable to stimulate them by questions in the same way as previously described, but some questioning of a more general kind may still be useful where the pictures are all markedly similar in type (as we hope they will be). After some lessons of this kind, so that each child has written on perhaps three photographs, it is often interesting to the children for the best results to be displayed on a notice-board in the classroom, beneath the pictures used as stimuli.

In addition to using photographs, however, it may be possible, with the co-operation of the school's art department, to use some good colour reproductions. As we shall see in greater detail when we are dealing with more polished descriptive writing,¹ these have the advantage – the painter's advantage over the photographer – that they show not only *emphasis* (which the skilled photographer can to some extent achieve) but also the *selection* of significant detail. Much will depend here on the individual teacher's tastes but at its best the lesson using good reproductions of paintings can combine genuine art appreciation with learning to write vividly – since, as with poetry, the need for an *active* response is clearly demonstrated.

Here we have one of those important connecting links between subjects which open up all kinds of interesting possibilities of co-operation and exchange of ideas between the art teacher and the English teacher. Through such a two-way relationship, the art teacher may find that the children's imaginative painting is more sensitive after they have been exploring the same realms of experience in English lessons, while their writing about paintings may also become markedly perceptive. It was as a result of such an interchange that one art teacher began using mime quite extensively as a kind of 'loosening-up' exercise with some more backward classes. And why not poetry too?

The advantages of this kind of interchange do not end here. It is fairly obvious that, to the child fresh from junior school and somewhat bewildered by 'different' teachers and 'different' subjects, the perception of the inter-relatedness of two or more branches of learning is reassuring and probably invigorating. One cannot help feeling that much more co-operation could usefully take place between at least the teachers of English, history, geography, music and art.

Whatever the stimulus used, however, the aims remain constant: the creation of a classroom atmosphere of heightened awareness in which we may continue the training of an active sensibility through the

¹ See Chapter 2.

deliberate and disciplined exercise of the imagination; the development of a habit of close attention to the details of scenes and experiences made stale by familiarity – to things for their own sake, as determining the choice of words; and with these features, amongst the more able children, a growing appreciation of ‘mood’. In fact, whether we like it or not, we are attempting something very like that which

Mr Wordsworth . . . was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, . . . by awakening the mind’s attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us; in inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.¹

Putting the Theory into Practice

The child between eight and twelve is not egocentric as he was at four to seven because he was too absorbed with his interests and activities. He is extraverted, interested in the outside world; not introverted, turned into himself.

Childhood and Adolescence,
J. A. Hadfield, Pelican Books, p. 164.

In the introduction I have argued that the interests of the subject and the child are not opposed; that the material we work with at each stage should be firmly based on the normal interests of a child of this age. Thus in the first year of secondary school one attempts, above all, to make use of the child’s lively interest in the world around him. This is merely an application, within the sphere of English work, of what Mr Hadfield says about ‘mental hygiene’:

As in all periods the main task is to encourage all those activities which are dominant at this age and to give every opportunity for their development.
(p. 170, *op. cit.*)

Since my main concern in this section is with the practical application of the scheme in the first year or so, the quotations above may seem to reiterate something which is generally accepted and which is at this point largely irrelevant. In fact, however, such a general, theoretical acceptance may lead us to ignore possible practical applications.

Any reasonably comprehensive account of this stage of development is likely to be pregnant with suggestions for the teacher of English. Though I shall offer some ideas on possible topics for the work at various stages, the important thing to note is the type of topic rather

¹ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 147 in the Everyman Edition.

than anything more specific. What has proved successful with children of a particular background and environment may well need to be adapted before it can be used with children of a different type, living in a different area. The teacher must therefore begin by learning something about the district and type of home from which his pupils come. Once he has understood this, the reading of such an account of childhood and adolescence as that quoted, far from being merely theoretical and irrelevant, should give him plenty of ideas to work on, as do the following passages from Mr Hadfield's book:

We call it the 'age of socialisation' because at this age children like to be together and join in corporate activities for a common purpose. . . . We call it also the 'primitive man' period because at this age the child . . . is interested in those activities we associate with primitive life, such as camping, hiking, fishing, climbing trees, swimming, playing at Red Indians, and 'messing about in boats'. (p. 159.)

The children utter wild war-whoops; they make raids on orchards; they plot amongst themselves; they go hunting; they catch birds and rabbits; they are untidy and they steal when inclined . . . (p. 160.)

Physiologically, this period from eight to twelve is said to be the healthiest in life. It is the period of greatest vitality. . . . Children of this age have good appetites and eat well. They will eat almost anything and want plenty of it . . . (p. 160.)

He goes all out in full-blooded activity and has not great staying power. . . . He is full of life, and full of interest in everything and in all people. . . . His enthusiasms are strong, though often short-lived . . . (p. 161.)

Among other points raised I noted references to the child's hatred of being muffled up and fussed over generally; to his lack of concern with and understanding of adults; to his new interest in nature; to his passion for collecting things; to his interest in practical tasks and his intellectual curiosity. All this may seem obvious, so I will turn to something more clearly relevant – some specific topics, together with a commentary on their use and treatment.

Generally in the first two years the main emphasis will be on accurate visualisation, with the subjects at first severely limited in scope and designed to train the inward eye – 'thrush and snail', 'plough cutting a furrow', 'fog round a lamp post'. Other modes of perception rapidly become involved, e.g. 'wave breaking over a rock', 'kettle boiling', 'sausages frying'. After some practice in the description of actions, scenes and objects, it will probably be found desirable to look at *people*, though from a purely external standpoint: our postman, our doctor, the barber.

The following illustrates fairly clearly the characteristics I feel desirable in poems used as stimuli.

TO THE FOUR COURTS, PLEASE

The driver rubbed at his nettly chin
 With a huge loose forefinger, crooked and black;
 And his wobbly violet lips sucked in,
 And puffed out again and hung down slack:
 A black fang shone through his lop-sided smile,
 In his little pouched eye flickered years of guile.
 And the horse, poor beast! It was ribbed and forked;
 And its ears hung down, and its eyes were old;
 And its knees were knuckly; and, as we talked,
 It swung the stiff neck that could scarcely hold
 Its big, skinny head up – then I stepped in,
 And the driver climbed to his seat with a grin.
 God help the horse, and the driver too!
 And the people and beasts who have never a friend!
 For the driver easily might have been you,
 And the horse be me by a different end!
 And nobody knows how their days will cease!
 And the poor, when they're old, have little of peace!

James Stephens

This has a considerable success with children of ten to eleven years and is just what is needed to drive home our first talk on 'really looking at things'. (If necessary the last verse may be omitted.) Not only is there the right kind of detail but it is suited to the children's interests (in animals especially) while the description of the driver with its tendency towards caricature immediately arouses interest and amusement.¹ Again, in the simplicity of its sentence construction, it is almost a reflection of the way some children write. I am not suggesting that we want to perpetuate the use of endless co-ordinate clauses, but here it helps the child to accept the poem.

LYING UNDER A TREE

Dry twigs and husks and crackling leaves
 Pricked at her elbows. She peered
 At spiders straddling the shreds of bark
 And filmy skeletons of last year's leaves.
 A patch of moss frothed into tiny flowers:
 Pale shoots of bluebell, mercury or grass
 Thrust green tongues above a sea of brown . . .

James Nimmo

Here, again, the visual predominates and the experience described is common to all. This is a poem which could be either an effective stimulus to composition or a 'corrective' – the children first writing on the same subject and then comparing their work with the poem.

¹ This can, of course, be reinforced and extended by using analogous material, e.g. Conrad's description of the cab-horse in *The Secret Agent*, or Kierkegaard's *Journals*, section 551.

DIGGING

Today I think
Only with scents, – scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field;

Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the root of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery;

The smoke's smell, too,
Flowing from where a bonfire burns
The dead, the waste, the dangerous,
And all to sweetness turns,

It is enough
To smell, to crumble the dark earth,
While the robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

Edward Thomas

This is a particularly good poem to use when one is attempting to correct the balance, to show just how much we depend on sensations of smell, taste and hearing as well as seeing. It is also very useful in work with fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds on memories, with their elusive sense impressions and their characteristic selectiveness.

In the following poem many sense impressions are mingled, yet without that element of self-consciousness which we shall be discussing in the next chapter.

CHILD ON TOP OF A GREENHOUSE

The wind billowing out the seat of my britches,
My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,
The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers,
Up through the streaked glass, flashing with sunlight,
A few white clouds all rushing eastward,
A line of elms plunging and tossing like horses,
And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!

Theodore Roethke

Undoubtedly this is one of the most successful 'stimulus' poems I have used. It suggests all kinds of childhood adventures that can be written about and it also manages to evoke vividly the essence of a rather complex experience, with marked emotional undertones.

We come now to work by children. The first example illustrates the best kind of writing – a real exploration and rediscovery of familiar experience. The boy who wrote it was of good grammar school

intelligence, but lazy and erratic. The subject, which was made challengingly limited, awoke him – going home, even on a wet day, was evidently something he enjoyed!

FOUR-TWENTY-TWO¹

The wind whistled through the lonely churchyard. The rain swept across the wide, deserted, three-laned road and across the farmland in which a deserted tractor stood its ground in the swaying grass. The battered wall was about to crumble a trifle more. The clayey soil in between the road and the footpath was just plain mud. The footpath which runs in between the mud and church wall was now like a stream down to the bus-stops where it then became straggled in the grooves which scarred the ground.

It was now 4.20. The pupils of Churchfields Comprehensive School started to stream out of the doors, but, as they shrugged their shoulders, they met the cold bitter wind and rain which whirled around them. As they trudged along in a dreary fashion the mud became thicker. As the rain streamed down and bounced off everything it hit, particularly satchels, it hit the satchel and smashed into nothing and then fell back and dripped off the satchel. When it hit somebody's coat it was just soaked in. Shoes had no shine on them; they were just dull.

By now it was just 4.22, the middle of the crowds. One boy passed; he seemed to be shivering, but he didn't seem to know it. His shoes were the dulllest, his satchel was the wettest and he was also walking the slowest. He walked into a puddle and came out drenched round the ankles. His hair covered his eyes; it was straggled and flat. His lips were moving; he was muttering something about homework. 'I could break that teacher's neck!' he mumbled. 'Five whole pages, huh, it's about time they changed the so-called teachers. I could tell them twice as much as they know, but they know, never them, always you.'

All of a sudden he gave a startled shout: 'Hey, wait!' but it was in vain, he was late, the last bus was speeding away, leaving a spray of water behind it. 'Huh, everything's happening to me.'

He threw a brick at the bus-rail then sat down with a thump on the wringing wet bus-rail, but it did not matter, he was already drenched to the skin. He wiped his hands over his face to put cold, bitter rainwater to cool him. He shook his head and then forgot all about his homework and thought about something else, which appeared to be nice, for he wore a smile on his face. He was in luck! As his hands searched his pockets, he found twopence so he trudged on to the public bus-stops.

The preparation for this was on exactly the lines suggested earlier but since the class was an able one, when the initial five minutes were over, a rough plan of paragraphs was given under the headings:

1. The scene outside
2. Out they come!
3. Description of one particular boy
4. At the bus stop

¹ School finished at 4.20 p.m.

The first paragraph is accurate and evokes almost painfully the memory of inadequate footpaths in the days when the school was only half finished. In the second, one sees that he has really responded to the question – ‘They’re not just “wet” – what do they really look like?’ Most remarkable, of course, is the final paragraph which apart from the inappropriate cliché ‘wringing wet’ applied to the bus-rail, conveys with admirable directness and economy both scene and mood; note the irritation and boredom implicit in the simple detail – ‘He threw a brick at the bus rail then sat down with a thump . . .’ ‘To cool him’ is another accurate touch, since the walk to the bus stop was a long one.

In the following piece there is, in the effort to suggest the right mood, a less flexible approach, and possibly a tendency towards exaggeration. It may be that the introductory questions during the preparation were badly phrased, tending to suggest too much rather than elicit a personal response. Nevertheless it is quite effective in its intensity, particularly the third sentence in the second paragraph.

HOMework

The reluctant . . . (?) finishes his slice of bread and butter. Slowly he took his satchel, slung it on his back then walked into the sitting room. With a sigh he drew up the chair, a hard, uncomfortable one. A chair worn smooth by constant wear.

The miserable wretch dragged out two dilapidated, dog-eared torn, dirty red books. The boy looked at them in disgust then muttered something inaudible. For some time his pen scratched and scribbled out an illegible script labouriously. Almost painfully he slaved away, his books littered with blots and smudges. He lifted his head for a short rest. Then resumed his homework, his forehead knitted and furrowed in deep concentration.

Often, of course, the response to subjects shows a verbal facility which gains the upper hand while the imaginative concentration flags:

THE BULLDOZER

Thundering, blundering, plundering,
The force.
A Monster!
Crushing through all that stands before it.
Lashing, smashing, thrashing,
Through walls, through undergrowth, through fences
Through field, through valley!
Crushing the weaker, tormenting the stronger,
Purring in its glory.

Here there is vigour, but also indifferent visualisation and the intrusion of irrelevant ideas culminating in a thoroughly ‘woolly’ ending. Often too, however, generally undistinguished efforts are illuminated

by occasional touches of real accuracy – as in the following, which is generally not bad, but has remarkably vigorous fourth and fifth lines:

A grimy chugging sound broke the still morn
 A heavy
 Monotonous sound.
 A brawny mud-caked machine cut into
 the half-bitten hillside
 Hugging and tugging at the mound
 Till finally it withdrew,
 Leaving a flattened, bared patch of land.

The following poem is characterised by extremely detailed visualisation of exactly the kind we are trying to encourage:

THE FISH

A streak through the water
 Thin sleek fins sway to and fro with the water,
 Its tail grinding it through the water,
 Eyes set well back, sight seeing the Fisherman's maggot,
 Then 'Gulp' down goes the maggot with the hook, and out
 he goes, squirming like a maggot on the hook.
 His mouth, with the thick set lips bleeding bright red blood,
 He is out, the fisherman wraps his hand round the
 scaly body which captures the sunlight,
 Then off comes the hook and away he goes a streak
 through the water.

Both these subjects were sufficiently well defined to encourage accuracy but scope must be given to aspects of experience which are less limited and specific. Generally this results in a much greater unevenness and, of course, a wider variety of response.

ALONE IN THE DARK

The creepiness, and spookiness of the dark, all silent, then out of the stillness the silence is broken. A car goes flying past. Footsteps can be heard, I run as fast as I can. The headlights shine in the darkness, someone's walking behind me, I know. I turn round frightened to death, but there's no one there . . .

Here, though there is little purely verbal facility, the writer is striving energetically to get to grips with a complex experience. The punctuation, which is none too polished (an unimportant weakness at this stage and in this kind of exercise), nevertheless allows a certain impression of the mood of incipient panic.

The same subject can produce something much more objective, more reflective:

DARKNESS

Darkness is vivid, strange, supernatural yet common. It comes silent like a ghost and goes smoothly to whence it came. It is used as a stronghold by the timid. Darkness is eiry, still and stagnant like a swamp. But it is not impregnable, light will pierce it like a piece of wire through cheese. Many fear the dark for its grimness.

The end is bathos but this seems unimportant after the startling simile in the previous sentence. Generally, if the concentration during the preparation has been good, each child's writing will reflect some attempt to grapple with experience: sometimes this shows in a single phrase or line; sometimes it glows dimly through an unpractised and limited vocabulary. But in most cases there will be something to praise, and this is essential in our teaching the child to appreciate the quality of intensity.

One of the possible disadvantages of using a poem as a stimulus is that its form may be slavishly copied without reference to the experience to be described. This difficulty disappears with growing experience and practice, however, so that occasionally a child may take over instinctively the whole framework of the original and make it his own. The following illustrates this:

ON A BIG DIPPER

The wind tearing at my hair,
My face and hands tingling,
The people below like dolls,
The screams and shrieks of the passengers.
The music and laughter drumming in my ears.
My hands wringing wet with sweat.
Flying along at a terrifying speed.
Looking down, down.
Feeling sick, turning green, going dizzy.
Slipping and sliding in my seat.
Flags fluttering in the wind.
People whizzing by below, shouting and waving.
Everyone carefree and gay.

The foregoing illustrations have all been taken from the work of eleven-year-old children with some linguistic skill, children who range from average grammar school B-stream to secondary modern A-stream. The training of the sensibility can in fact be undertaken with much less able children though much of the work, particularly in the early stages, will be oral. In the writings of such children, however, it is much less easy to put one's finger on the accurate word or vivid phrase since the language is generally impoverished, and it is this which makes it difficult to use as illustrative material.

Before attempting, in spite of what has been said, to illustrate this heightened awareness, characteristically muffled by an insecure grasp of language, I should stress that the results here – even more perhaps than elsewhere – are dependent on the right kind of preparation. The imaginative concentration and the teacher's questioning techniques are vitally important; he must probe widely, must goad the children's imaginations into a response and once again he will be able to learn much from watching their faces as he attempts to do so. He may well find that their concentration is at first disappointing but he will be wrong if he deduces from this that the exercise is necessarily beyond them – it is much more likely that his own questions have been badly framed. Again, erratic concentration should warn him against demanding too much; he should be satisfied if, in the first few months, they can write earnestly for perhaps ten minutes.

In the following example of the work of a less able child, I should explain that the choice of yet another passage dealing with a 'rainy day' is not the result of a gloomy and neurotic English preoccupation with dismal weather, but an attempt to make comparison easier.

When I am lying in bed I can tell that it is raining because I can here it bouncing on the window pains. I would then go downstairs and look outside everyting is wet and damp. I have to go to school in this awful rain I stepped outside and opened the gate and my hand got wet my mack is soaking and is quite damp inside it. As I walk across the fields my legs rub against the tall wet grass and they got wet and the paths are covered in pools.

This child is not incompetent but the language is far less mature than in the other extracts quoted. Though we have seen much worse spelling and punctuation, the unsure tenses are significant. She is exploring here her own experience, but in a disarticulated way – lighting on one aspect, pausing, and then discovering something else. The vocabulary in a more able child would seem flat and obvious; nevertheless this child is really facing the problem of communicating her experience. This is shown clearly in the details 'and my hand got wet' and 'is quite damp inside it', where the recollection is accurate though the expression is insensitive. In much work at and below this level (perhaps the top of a secondary modern C-stream) there are no such details that we can pin-point and say 'that is good', but knowing the children and their limited skill we can clearly sense an increased striving to communicate. This is impossible to illustrate adequately but most teachers will have had the experience of reading the work of some unpromising and unskilled child who has been 'touched off', just once, by a subject and whose writing, scruffy, ill-spelt though it may be,

reaches an altogether different level in the urgency of his desire to communicate a personal experience.

At this point it is worth while distinguishing between the dull and the backward child. With the latter there is often obvious difficulty in concentration, frequently caused by emotional disturbances and shown either by extremely fidgety and erratic behaviour or, more obviously, by complete withdrawal. It seems that in this last case there is a special need to attempt work of the kind we have been describing. If we can get such children even for a while to come to terms with their real (as opposed to their fantasy) environment the benefits will not be limited to their work in English. Given a teacher who can gauge the right moment to demand a short spell of intense, imaginative concentration, the child's capacity for day-dreaming can in fact be enlisted as a positive asset.

Here are some examples of first-year work by backward children:

SNOW

Cold, and silent,
Quitely it falls,
The snow.
tangling with the hair
sticking to the coat
Soft under foot,
faster and faster it comes
colder and colder it gets
up goes umbereles
down goes the blinds
A bell breaks the silence
And then,
all is quit again

SNOW

When the first snow come I went out in it. The snow was very deep and cold. I plunged my hand into it. I made a cup shape of my hand and brought out a heap of snow. I throw it down on the flor and it mixet with the other snow. As I walked on the snow stook to my shoes I knoked it of and went on. Ferther on in the day it got cold so went in to have a warm. My mother asked me to go to the shops I felt like saying no but I went.

FIRST DEEP SNOW OF WINTER

The first time I went out in deep snow I had a sensasional feeling of your foot sinking in the snow. It is rather like treading in some mud it stiks to your shoes. When you loak doan you see how you have pushed the snow into a foot print. I particulaly dont like the feeling of it my boot being conceled in the slush. One particuly I like is is making a snow ball I get my hand and scoop up some snow and push my other onto it to make a ball then press it hard.

Though I have suggested that with such sets as that from which these children came the work will be mostly oral, the examples above show that one should not be too diffident about attempting some writing. As one must expect at this level, their quality depends less upon the accuracy of particular words – though there are some noteworthy touches – than upon the general impression. In each of the extracts one cannot help feeling the writer is really involved in the re-creation of personal experience.

There are further reasons why the extracts are interesting. It will have been noted that the first is written in a sort of free verse. Some children who very rarely write more than a few lines of 'composition' appear to find writing in this way much easier. I am not suggesting that what they write is really worthy of the description 'free verse'; what is important is that the children often write much more freely – whether verse or dislocated prose matters little at this level. Not only this: the layout, though perhaps not conducive to correct sentence construction, does help the children to concentrate on the small details of an experience and to see more clearly where they have been accurate and where vague. When they use the whole line in compositions of the normal type, the work of backward children is often so messy that they are able to read it through only with difficulty.

The second and third passages reflect good concentration during the preparatory period. On this occasion they had been asked to remember some of their feelings when out in the snow, in particular what they felt when they made a snowball. One or two children mimed this very accurately and the class was asked to suggest words to describe the movements involved; amongst those suggested were 'cupped hands', 'plunge', and 'scoop'. Though the class were unable to do more than make a start on the actual writing and had to complete it for homework – which is not at all ideal, particularly with backward children – the benefit from the preparation was clearly evident: many remembered words suggested and the writings of several, like the two quoted, suggested accurate visualisation of the mime.

Children of this type are often rather ebullient and hence the period of preparation, as in this case, may apparently get out of hand with the teacher being fairly pelted with suggestions. This doesn't matter.¹ Indeed, I think it is often best to set out to explore some well-defined

¹ As I pointed out earlier, with the abler children the teacher's questions are not intended to be answered aloud but to provoke a silent, interior response. With the less able some opportunities for oral response will be necessary but one should be working towards an increasingly silent and intense period of preparation, especially where written work is concerned.

area of experience without having finally decided what you are going to make of it all until you have assessed the children's reaction. Such periods are useful for vocabulary work alone, while the mime element is an invaluable spur to imagination. Again, it sharpens the children's interest if they are never quite sure what demand is ultimately going to be made of them.

I have tried to emphasise that the scheme of imaginative composition must be used flexibly; that the progressive stages are by no means fixed. The next two illustrations interestingly demonstrate how dangerous is any generalisation about ages and standards. The first is taken from the work of a ten-year-old boy in a B-stream. It is, I think, characteristic of a kind of writing that is often begun even earlier in many enlightened primary schools: an article in *The Use of English* has shown similar work done by children of eight years of age.¹ Another interesting point about this extract is that it was written after Roethke's poem had been read in the preparatory period; the subject was chosen as having the same basic 'vibrancy' – i.e. both situations are emotionally charged.

MYSELF IN A TREE

I felt all cold, the branches seemed to keep prodding me as soon as I turned round, as if to say, 'Go back!' the bark was stiff, and it hurt my hands, the more I moved the more frightened I got, as soon as the wind started the leaves seemed to be chattering, the birds seemed to be looking at me and laughing, the grass swayed with the wind and made a horrible rustling noise.

It is surprising, then, just how early some children take to this kind of writing. It is also surprising how late they may do so. The second illustration was written by a boy aged fourteen in a secondary modern D-stream.

FISHING

The float was still in the
lake so deep.
But beneath the fish were not
The maget twisted and turned
as the fish drew near.
One grab and the maget was gone.
A ripple and the float sunk
a visous tug of his rod.
The fish was caught althow
he fought there was no escape.

That fish is in a glass case now.
He will not swim in that lake again but in a case and
dead but proud all the same.

¹ Frank L. Pinfold, 'Free Verse Writing' in *Use of English*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, Winter 1961.

There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that non-academic children of about this age can often enjoy and, I believe, profit from the kind of work I have outlined for first- and second-year children of moderate or good ability. Third-year children near the bottom of the ability-range appear sufficiently unsophisticated to find interest in the exploration of such 'elementary', familiar experience, whereas their abler contemporaries now tend to shy away from it.

This was strikingly confirmed recently, when I tried the approach out with a secondary modern third-year C-stream. At this level it is all too common to find that lack of success has bred a kind of dull apathy towards most of the subjects taught, and where this is so the kind of work I tried would seem to have a special value. It is very clear cut in its scope and the pupils seem reassured by their ability, for once, to see what is being demanded of them. After regular weekly exercises for a couple of months there was a notable improvement not only in their writing but consequently also in their attitude and morale. Aimlessness and depression can be turned to advantage, and subjects like 'The local coffee-bar', 'Motor-bikes', 'Mucking about', and any topic exploiting their adolescent malaise may set the children off. The great thing is for them to discover that they have something to say; so often one is asked, 'What is there to say about that, sir?' With such children the kind of imaginative preparation already explained seems particularly helpful and enables them to grapple not only with 'adolescent' topics but also with subjects very like those set in the first year. After some work of this type they readily grasp the idea of 'accuracy' and in consequence their writing becomes much denser in texture as they really wrestle with their experience. The following example, on one of the most successful subjects, is a fair indication of the new gusto which became noticeable in their writing.

FRYING AN EGG

I was listening to the crack of the shell as it struck the side of the pan and the egg and yolk trickled down the slanted side into the hot crackly fat it began to move slowly around the pan as though it was lost. Then a kind of experiment worked and the liquid went into a white solid object. Then there was a fine skin on top of the yolk and the white went rather crisp. It then broke up and fell all over the plate then the sauce was put all over it. It was covered in thick sauce ready to slide down my throat.

Whatever one's views on the habit of smothering food in H.P. or ketchup, this must appear a quite vital piece of writing. When one considers that the boy who wrote this was a depressed, nervous and under-sized thirteen-and-a-half-year-old who normally came near the

bottom of the class, it seems even better. He was, moreover, thoroughly aware of the improvement that this represented and the effect upon his morale was like a tonic. There is little point in analysing the merits of the passage in detail; the important thing is the over-all impression of careful visualisation, of a real striving to communicate, which is nowhere more clearly evident than in the laboratory-image, 'Then a kind of experiment worked . . .'.

The discussion of the work of third-year children is a partial digression from the main topic of the chapter, however, and so I may perhaps conclude by yet another quotation from Mr Hadfield: speaking of the years eight to twelve, he says

Of all the phases of childhood, this is the one I personally like most: boys and girls are so interested in life, so full of fun and vitality, so natural in their enthusiasms!¹

When the children enter the secondary school they are nearing the end of this phase. If the kind of approach I have so far outlined has a value, it is surely that it enables the child to find expression, within school, for some of his characteristic gusto and zest instead of leaving all that part of himself outside the school gate. It is a great thing 'to be a man' but I cannot believe that the full development of the child's personality is best encouraged by prematurely forcing him to 'put away childish things'.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 171.

2 – *The Second and Third Years: The Growth of Consciousness*

It has been before observed that images, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit . . .

S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*

As already admitted, the stages outlined here are somewhat arbitrary and the division I am now making between the work for first- and that for second-year children is a case in point. Nevertheless this division may serve to emphasise two general truths about children's development:

1. in this second year we may expect to see the nascence of adolescent self-consciousness
2. by this time the children are readier to be 'art-conscious' – to look at their work more critically and to learn some simple concepts of form and style

It was suggested in the introduction that the difference between this year's and the previous year's work will be largely one of complexity: the more complicated scenes and sensory experiences now to be dealt with call for a greater degree of organisation and conscious technique. This does not imply that work of the kind undertaken in the first year is now finished with – what they learnt then will still be applied, and exercises of a first-year type may still be useful as an occasional corrective where vagueness intrudes, as it often does, for instance, in the writing of simple narrative.

Though the main characteristic of this year's work will be its increased complexity, it will also differ from what has gone before in its greater stress on *people* as opposed to *things*. While I am not advocating their use as a rigid scheme of work, I think that the following three

stages may help the teacher to select suitable material, partly because they suggest a progression from the relatively simple to something more complex and demanding:

1. Scenes involving the description of people, especially of types familiar to the pupils (e.g. bus-conductors, shopkeepers, etc.)
2. Description of their own feelings in real situations. (The element of controlled introspection which may be involved here seems well suited to the increasing self-consciousness already referred to.)
3. Description of their own feelings in imagined situations.

(The act of deliberate projection needed in Stage 3 is not something normally to be attempted without some helpful stimulus. Here again poems, pictures and prose extracts are invaluable and there is of course an infinite range of possible material, allowing each teacher to select according to his own taste. In this kind of work it will be obvious that the dividing line between composition and comprehension – or appreciation – is a very narrow one indeed, but this is surely as it ought to be; they are complementary, and anything which tends to break down specious divisions between the different aspects of work in English is to be encouraged.)

If the scope of the work outlined above appears somewhat limited, this is because it corresponds with this stage of the child's development, at which his understanding of himself and other people is naturally limited also. As already argued in the previous chapter, at the age of eleven or twelve he is interested in people, but from a relatively external viewpoint and in a relatively superficial way. For some years his characteristic technique of 'identification' will have enabled him – by playing a series of imaginary rôles – to enrich his experience and, to some extent, to deepen his insight. He is not yet really ready to understand people, however: for him, the adult is still a person whose arbitrary commands represent the incursion of a different kind of being into his own 'real' world – he accepts such phenomena without giving them much thought.¹ With the onset of puberty all this begins to change. While Stage 1 seems to me to utilise the kind of interest he is capable of before adolescence really begins, Stage 2 is intended to harmonise with his withdrawal from his earlier extraverted attitude. His growing interest in his own feelings will of course be interwoven with new and often disturbing feelings about other people; for example, it is often at about this time that the child acquires a totally

¹ The reader who is anxious to get away from psychology, and to think in more literary terms, is urged to read the account of childhood in H. G. Wells' *Kipps*, Chapter I.

new view of his parents. All this experience is too raw, undigested and, above all, too private for us to trespass upon it. Later, I believe, we may enable him by the exercise of his imaginative faculty to come to terms with at least some of it; for the present, however, we do well to limit ourselves. We can help him explore some parts of his new self but we must be prepared for some superficiality and, by comparison with what has gone before, with an uncertainty and apparent loss of verve and zest in his writing. That is why this seems a good time to concentrate upon technique, which he finds reassuringly straightforward and unembarrassing. By doing so we are acting in the best interests of both subject and pupil.

It is worth emphasising once again that the work is by no means limited to the three types: there is this distinctive new slant but just as the kind of description undertaken in the first year will enter into work in the second and third years, so will these three stages overlap and intermingle. Again, since practice in such things as narrative will be needed from time to time, elements of the above scheme can be worked into this.

A further essential link with what has gone before is provided by the preparatory period. The method of preparation remains exactly the same as in the first year, so that the children easily recognise and respond to the demand that is being made of them.

Their response to the demand will be conditioned by the extent to which they understand it, however, and the nature of the imaginative work we wish them to attempt at this stage soon poses problems. Previously 'accuracy' has been a sufficient standard for most of them to aim at but this is no longer enough. As the self-consciousness of adolescence takes hold, their perceptiveness, though not necessarily diminished, becomes less clear and uncomplicated and the support of technique and organisation more urgently needed.

To our sustained imaginative discipline, then, there is added a linguistic and logical discipline.¹ As in drama, towards the end of the second year self-consciousness makes technique an interesting and helpful support to the child – he needs to assess his own success and it aids him in this. His recognition of the need for care in the organisation of his work is further helped by his growing awareness of the difficulty

¹ The reader is reminded that the exact time when this is appropriately introduced will vary considerably: with semi-academic children, for instance, the organisational demands should probably be delayed at least until late in the second year, the concentration remaining simply on the development of accuracy together with a heightened self-awareness. Non-academic children will probably be a year behind this, and may well still be operating primarily on an oral level.

of handling more complex experiences, and of his obligation to the reader to communicate his experience as clearly as possible.

This second point seems particularly important. Much of the child's work in organising his writing which would otherwise be difficult or meaningless acquires a point as soon as he has learnt to see his task not merely as writing for himself – as soon as he has built up in his mind an imaginary reader whose requirements he must fulfil.

In the first place children can be made conscious of weakness in their own work by getting them to read each other's compositions and by asking such questions as 'Can I, from what is written here, really imagine this scene or incident?' and 'Is the general outline of this narrative clear?' From such rudimentary exercises in criticism¹ they will learn to see the point of a paragraph: they will find that the idea of its having unity is not an arbitrary imposition from above but an obligation in fairness to the reader; they will realise, conversely, that to compel the poor reader to indulge in a bewildering game of 'mental leapfrog' from one idea to another is unfair.

Secondly, the beginnings of a feeling for structure can be taught by the consideration of a newspaper. Why has it main headings, columns, sub-titles, paragraphs, etc.? One can also demonstrate the same point by reference to stanza form, e.g. 'The Big Rock Candy Mountain'. From such work they should be able to return to their own work and make some simple assessment of whether or not they have been *fair* to their readers.

It is best to consider paragraphing first as an element of narration. Here the idea of time sequence is easily grasped and the children can see that, for example, the events of a morning can usefully be separated from those of the following afternoon as marking a distinct stage in the story. When the idea of the narrative paragraph has been understood and applied, we can begin work on the more difficult task of studying paragraphing in descriptions, but of this more later. In all this, the paragraph is only readily comprehensible in terms of *meaning* – the fewer abstractions introduced the better. There is clearly a need here for reference to their reading – Why does X use short paragraphs here? Why does he start a new paragraph there? – and so on.

It may well be felt that something is lost by not stressing paragraphing in the first year. When one considers, however, just how imperfect is the grasp of paragraphing normally achieved in this way, the loss seems insignificant. The gain, on the other hand, is considerable, for we are now able to introduce this study at a time when it can be

¹ On this point, see also Chapter 10, p. 227.

made thoroughly meaningful from the outset and can therefore be learnt and applied much more rapidly. This does not imply, of course, that the word paragraph will never have been mentioned in the previous year – it is in fact a good idea, when setting narrative exercises in the first year, occasionally to give the children paragraph divisions to work from.¹ This is sometimes effective in helping children to write a full narrative and avoid vagueness, while at the same time they gain some insight into what a paragraph is. The point to emphasise, however, is that we shall not aim during the first year at teaching anything more than very rudimentary organisation. They must learn to perceive before we ask them to organise their perceptions.

Once the elementary structure and organisation of narrative writing have been understood, it is possible – with the more able children – to embark on some consideration of the descriptive paragraph. This may well come towards the end of the second year or, with the less able in the middle of the third year, however, for it involves a much more conscious appreciation of writing technique than anything that has gone before.

For children of this age, the main element in such an appreciation will be learning to understand and recognise the peculiar 'mood' of any piece of descriptive writing. In studying this concept, we shall need also to elucidate two other related ideas of great importance: selection and emphasis.

The problem is best posed – initially – in visual terms. The class may be asked to look out of the window for a minute, on an ordinary day. Then, facing front again, they are asked to say what they saw. There will be a variety of disorganised individual responses which form a good basis for discussion. By careful questioning, the teacher can lead the children to see that their perception is not a photographic, but a highly individual process, and to note how the response of individuals may reflect personal interests, characteristics and past experience. This is sometimes most clearly shown by considering what the children did *not* see.

In further discussing the subjective nature of perception, we make it clear that this means that descriptive writing must be personal. It may now be helpful to compare descriptive writing with first *photography*, and then *painting*.

The children readily grasp the contrast between the description and

¹ As was done, in fact, with the example quoted in Chapter 1, p. 36, entitled 'Four-Twenty-Two'. This is one of the aspects of structure in writing that is dealt with, from a slightly different angle, in Chapter 7. The two chapters are in fact intended to complement each other.

photograph: the unselectiveness of the camera and its relative inability to stress or emphasise. Conversely, they see that it is ridiculous for a writer to attempt to give a photographic record – that the inclusion of everything would result in unnecessary length – and, remembering the writer's obligation to the reader, they will realise that a mass of undifferentiated detail would be virtually unintelligible.

They will understand also the kinship between the writer's and the painter's craft. A comparison of the treatment of two markedly different subjects or, better still, two contrasted views of the same subject will make clear the principles of selection and emphasis more easily, perhaps, than would a consideration of written work at this stage (though this, of course, will depend on the teacher). It may, for example, be possible to obtain two large reproductions of paintings about war, one of which stresses the martial glamour and touches little of the human reality, while the other – perhaps a Goya – depicts war in terms of human suffering.

When the processes of selection and emphasis are being revised in the third and fourth years, as they must inevitably be, they can be further illuminated by the use of poems side by side with pictures; Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est* springs readily to mind in this context.

Poems can also be very effective aids at the beginning of this critical work. It is probably best if they are short and clear in mood, so that their imaginative unity may easily be grasped. The following, with its clear emphasis on the dereliction of the old ship, is a good example of the simplest pictorial type.

THE DISMANTLED SHIP

In some unused lagoon, some nameless bay,
On sluggish, lonesome waters, anchored near the shore,
An old, dismasted, gray and batter'd ship, disabled, done,
After free voyages to all the seas of earth, haul'd up at
last and hawser'd tight,
Lies rusting, mouldering.

Walt Whitman

Poems of a personal type may often enable us to link up the work we have been doing on the children's own imaginative compositions with elementary critical appreciation; thus the child may gain insight into 'mood' in writing at the same time as being stimulated to explore his own experience in a similar way. Of such 'dual-purpose' poems, this by E. J. Scovell has always proved useful:¹

BOY FISHING

I am cold and alone,
On my tree-root sitting as still as stone.

¹ I refer to it again at the end of Chapter 8.

The fish come to my net. I scorned the sun,
The voices on the road, and they have gone.
My eyes are buried in the cold pond, under
The cold, spread leaves; my thoughts are silver-wet.
I have ten stickleback, a half-day's plunder,
Safe in my jar. I shall have ten more yet.

Here not only is the unity of atmosphere, the total absorption, easily understood by the pupil, but he is frequently reminded of similar experiences of his own. In fact, when I have used the poem I have usually asked them to see themselves doing something they enjoy – it may be anything, provided it is an activity in which they become totally absorbed. After one such lesson, a dedicated train-spotter, a second-year boy of grammar school B-stream ability, was found to have produced this:

‘COPS’

Waiting expectantly on a grassy bank in the heart of the quiet countryside, waiting, waiting for a whisp of smoke or the rumble of a diesel engine in the shimmering heat of the distance. First I looked up and then down the line always expecting and always hoping. Now and then I took a bite out of a sandwich and wondered if it was worth my while waiting and then all of a sudden . . . ‘Steam!’ I jumped up on to my feet, peering down the line and finally saw that it was a farmhouse chimney. My heart went down to my boots and I sank back on to the grass, downhearted and dejected. But then a ding-ding-ding came from the signal-box across the line. Hurrah! Something at last. I was on my feet again peering for smoke. There it was, a steam engine. There was its whistle. As it came nearer the more exciting it got. Would it be a rare one or a dirty old relic?

Here it comes, pounding down the line – a large, shiny steam engine spouting thick smoke and making a huge row. What a sight. Whoosh! Clackety-clack, clackety-clack, clackety, clackety. Hurrah! A great cop – I jumped and shouted for joy – what a beauty! I watched it till it was almost out of sight and slowly the clackety-clack of the carriages faded away.

I sat down very excited and pleased. Then came the moment of pride when I marked down the number neatly in my book.

‘Well, I’m certainly glad I came,’ I said to myself.

As soon as I said this – Clang! The large red signal shot majestically in the air.

‘Whow! Another one,’ I said to myself. ‘This is great.’

Suddenly a rumble in the distance could be heard – a main line diesel. Perhaps not so good and as exciting as steam engines, but you have to put up with them. Here it comes, speeding down the straight. Whrrrrr! Clackety-clack, clackety-clack, clackety-clack.

Boooooo! A dirty, green, main line diesel, one of the most commonest on the line. But I suppose you have to be unlucky some times.

All through the day, good luck, bad luck. Watching the trains go by, expresses hauled by steam engines, expresses hauled by diesel engines,

freighters, little local trains hauled by little tank engines. Gulping down pop and sandwiches and exploring around.

And then dusk begins to fall, the large red sun begins to set, all the countryside in deep peaceful silence except for an occasional call from a lone black-bird. Time to set out for home. As the train for home swayed in rhythm to the track, I looked back on the day, full of excitement and sometimes disappointment. But a great day all in all.

I have quoted this in full, since it illustrates a number of points with which this chapter is particularly concerned. In the first place, there has been good comprehension of the Scovell poem – comprehension in the fullest sense of the word: the experience described by the poet has been sufficiently meaningful to the boy for him to recognise the kind of experience described. This, in turn, has impelled him to describe an analogous experience of his own – a positive response to the poem, involving a far truer and more vital insight than is likely to be elicited by run-of-the-mill comprehension questions.

Secondly, the writer has grasped the importance of 'mood'. He establishes this and changes it with considerable competence – first, anticipation; then the excitement and noise of the train's passing; the contrast between the elation of a notable 'cop' and his contempt for a mere diesel, a contrast which sets the pattern for the whole day; and, finally, the satisfaction of a day well spent. The penultimate paragraph, in its effective suggestion of the passage of time and of concentration sustained whether the luck was good or bad, shows clearly how much he has learnt from the Scovell poem.

It may not be an outstanding piece of writing – there is some repetition and a certain straining for effect here and there – but it deals with the kind of more complex, personal experience that we want to work over at this stage, it shows some sense of form and mood and, whatever its faults, it conveys the experience with a convincingly authentic note and a thoroughly engaging zest.

This passage, since it reflects a definite, shaping viewpoint, achieves a certain unity of effect: because the writer wished to convey a particular mood and general impression, he was able to select and emphasise those aspects of the experience which seemed to him most significant. Conversely, the banal 'unselectiveness' of many children's writing – especially where the topic is too abstract or impersonal for them – is due in part to the absence of any dominant or shaping point-of-view; the process is esemplastic most clearly where the child is in some way involved in the scene or experience described.

One of the characteristics of the gifted imaginative child is that, when given a topic, he almost instinctively adopts a particular attitude to the

whole scene which enables him to mould its diverse details into a unity. This is not only a matter of ability, however, but also of age – the ten- to twelve-year-old is not normally capable of emphasising and selecting in the way necessary, though in a year or two the same problem may pose little difficulty. Before going further, it may be helpful to examine this esemplastic power at work, firstly in one of those rare children to whom one needs to teach virtually nothing, a first-year boy of high intelligence:

SNOW ON ROOF TOP

Glistening white, no contact with dirt or grime it rests, peacefully undisturbed as if staying there, but all the time it edges its way forward, so slow that the eye does not notice it. So slow that icicles cling to rifts like unwanted parasites, hanging in space from the edge of the roof. So slow that birds, starving, looking vainly for food rest there, weary exhausted. But all the time it seeks one achievement – to go crashing, roaring as a miniature avalanche, to the ground where it lands with a thump so great that, for one split second, the ground trembles, quakes at receiving such a weight so suddenly and with such impact. Meanwhile the snow rests, waiting silently until it too can go plunging into space. Only a thin layer near the top of the house and a drift on the chimney will not get this satisfaction for they will stay till they melt and run down the roof in rivulets of water. From a distance the roofs blend together in an array of dazzling whiteness. The snow seems secure but is not so.

The topic here was set to a whole class, most of whom responded well. By this I mean that they visualised the subject carefully and then wrote about it with considerable accuracy; the details had some unity because, quite simply, they were all about snow on roofs. The language, furthermore, was good in so far that it reflected children of this age grappling honestly with the task of conveying a limited, visual experience. Amongst the rest, however, the above passage stood out as being not merely better, or 'more accurate', but different in kind. This boy's extremely close visualisation of the snow on roofs had prompted in him a thought, a feeling about it, which transformed and gave meaning to the whole – his fascinated awareness of the implicit threat informs all that he has written.

I have quoted this not just because it shows an altogether rare and truly 'poetic' mode of perception but because it helps to illuminate the whole motivation of emphasis and selection. It is helpful, incidentally, when using a poem like that quoted of Whitman, to canvass for other possible attitudes that the poet might have taken to his subject, and how these would have led him to alter his treatment. If the class were, for example, an able third year, one could very pertinently introduce a detailed discussion on the different attitude of Turner to a similar

subject in the well-known painting 'The Fighting Temeraire', where the water, far from being 'sluggish', is bathed in a romantic, and symbolic, sunset glow.

Although the first example of a moulding and shaping viewpoint and its consequences, in terms of selection and emphasis, was from the work of an exceptionally gifted eleven-year-old child, it should not be assumed that it is only children of this type that are capable of such perception. In the next illustration we find a third-year girl, of secondary modern C-stream ability approximately, groping towards the expression of a complex idea of the same kind as that noted in the first example. Significantly – for this is one of the contexts in which the less able child is most likely to gain some insight into unity of mood or atmosphere¹ – the idea is based on a *contrast*: new bike – old garage/new garage – old bike.

MY BICYCLE AND GARAGE

My bike new red and shiny all polished up waiting to be ridden on. Standing there in an old garage what is dirty and dull and waiting to be pulled down. Every day I ride it so it would not be tired of waiting but be tired of being ridden on but now its time to have dinner so I put it away for another day. I get tired of my bicycle its getting old and skraded and dented. But the garage has gone pulled down antill non(?) but all the same its up again new and bright and gives in light now my bike is old not like some or very few old bicycles and garages new, or old garages and bicycles new it changes twice like a two sided disc.

The whole of this seems to me very interesting, but above all the last part where we see the writer, handicapped obviously by severe technical weaknesses, nevertheless really wrestling with the words to make them express a subtle abstract idea. The last illustration of the way in which the more sensitive but non-academic older child can achieve a certain unity of effect is less remarkable, but more competent in the relative muscularity of its language. With such children the necessary condition for success seems to be a personal involvement; where this condition is met, something comes through, no matter how imperfect the technique. This is merely putting in another way what I meant when I said earlier that much of the banality of many children's essays is partly attributable to the lack of a shaping point-of-view: where the child is really involved he tends naturally to mould his experience into some kind of unity. The following was written by a third-year boy of secondary modern A-stream intelligence.

¹ The less academic child may be introduced to the concept of mood through a brief study of any two paragraphs where the mood changes markedly from one to the next; the contrast serves to throw into relief the dominant mood of each.

THE ROW

As I wandered through rows and rows of condemned and half-demolished houses, an old ghost wandered through my mind, an old ghost of happiness, of small children screaming and shouting, girls playing hop-sotch, and old women nattering over garden-fences, white washing flapping in built-up yards and the high strong smell of pig-swill mixed with the strong breeze.

My house untouched by the night-marauders, nestling between two large red-brick houses. This place, the place where I spent my infant days, where our two gangs, Billy Smigger's and mine could fight. Then the day-dream broke, the harsh voice of the watchman echoed in the derelict house; at that I took to my heels and ran.

In the three passages quoted we have seen children using the esem-
plastic power of the imagination more or less by instinct, for in none
of these had the previous teaching been designed to help them; they
had merely been encouraged to write from their own experience and
in each case they found a topic where their own attitude was positive
enough for it to shape and unify all that they wrote. In a sense, then,
their success can be termed accidental and in some ways irrelevant to
our main concern: it sheds light on the working of the faculty we wish
to encourage but does little to illuminate the methods by which that
faculty may be developed. To such exercises in technique we must now
return.

In the first year the subjects set were very specific and limited in
scope, and one of the purposes of this was to avoid a difficulty, namely,
the need to mould the details perceived into some kind of unity. The
idea at that stage was simply to PERCEIVE and to leave problems of
manipulation and arrangement until a more appropriate time – until
the pupils were ready to face such a demand. Thus to some extent the
necessary selection and emphasis were 'built-in' or at least suggested
by the topics set. Where this is not done, the children's work tends to
be extremely unequal, precisely because they have been given too wide
a range and have no principle of selection to help them to focus.

When the most able pupils reach their second year, and the less gifted
their third, however, they are generally ready to attempt more exacting
work, involving some manipulation of ideas. Furthermore, a helpful
link between the two stages of the work is ready to hand: in the first
year they dealt with details of their experience, perceived and dwelt on
for their own intrinsic interest; now they will still be dealing with such
details, but this time these are to be used in order to produce a particular
effect. It is no longer the bricks but the wall that is to interest them.

I may perhaps make this clearer by taking a concrete example from
classroom practice. In the first year they may at some stage have

written about a cat; at that time they were asked to visualise it carefully and produce a verbal picture of it. Now they are going to use the description of a cat not for its intrinsic interest but for an ulterior purpose. At this point the teacher appears to go off at a tangent by asking them how they would describe a street in a very depressed slum area – Would they describe everything they saw? No? What then would they pick out . . . and why? After some hesitation, the pupils will begin to suggest things that are properly redolent of the general atmosphere which they now realise they need to convey to the reader. It should now be possible to read to them, from some novel, the description of a single detail which has been selected simply because it in some way emphasises the general impression the writer is trying to put over.

This done, the teacher may return to the subject of cats. The class are to write about a street in the slum area just discussed. But they are not to mention the street or area specifically – instead, they are to describe the appearance and movements of a cat in such a way as to suggest to the reader everything he needs to know about the general setting – his imagination will do the rest. This may seem a tall order, but in fact its apparent difficulty will spur on the more able child, who will be thoroughly intrigued by the problem he has been set. With less competent pupils, a simpler alternative at this stage is to set two contrasting subjects – 1. Slum Cat; 2. Aristocratic Cat.

Thus we have made the transition from detail interesting for its own sake to 'significant detail', detail chosen and emphasised for a particular purpose.¹ This is but one way in which the link can be made clear. Often there is no need to labour the point, however, for the concept of mood is easily grasped by the children.

When we have considered mood in paintings and poems, and have seen the processes of selection and emphasis at work shaping the whole experience, the children's insight can be further extended by discussing an imaginary writer's approach to particular scenes. Taking, for example, the topic 'Wet Day at Weymouth', we should be able by now to elicit from the class precise suggestions as to what our author might describe, what omit, together with possible reasons for his treating the subject in this way. They should be capable of explaining to the teacher just how the writer's desire to convey his own gloom and disappointment will colour the whole picture he gives. Such discussion

¹ Once again the close connection between all this and 'comprehension work' needs to be stressed. Indeed it will be necessary to reconsider various aspects here dealt with when we come to think about the critical faculty in the second section of the book.

helps to drive home the subjective nature of this kind of writing and the class are led to see how much depends on the writer's own frame of mind at the time. At this point again, the contrast between descriptive ('atmospheric') writing and photography can be illuminating.

The first work that the children are asked to undertake along these lines will be very specific and limited in scope. There is much to be said for beginning with single paragraphs based on given key sentences: 'The heat was unbearable'; 'And still it rained'; 'He had never felt so desperately homesick'. Such exercises need not always be written; it is often good practice to work out a paragraph of this kind by building it up round the class, with each child contributing a sentence on the given theme. This can help to counteract the thinness which spoils the work of many capable children right up to the fifth year, for it teaches them just how much there is to say and they learn to be more systematic in the development of their ideas. Furthermore they become conscious of the difference between ideas that are readily 'developable' and those which are not, and this again is a great advantage later on, when they come to the planning of formal essays.¹

While the work at this stage is generally limited to the writing of paragraphs on atmospheric key sentences, the abler child may already show a capacity for more sustained writing of the same kind. The following passage illustrates this, showing the ability to 'squeeze all the juice'² out of an idea, which is what we are hoping to foster by practice in writing single paragraphs of the type described. This was written by a third-year girl of good grammar school ability, the theme being suggested to her by the third key sentence (about home-sickness):

HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

The sun beat down relentlessly and the heat was oppressive. All around were swarms of flies and mosquitoes, regaling in the humid atmosphere. Huge swamps stretched out in the distance, and from the dense undergrowth strange noises and twitterings were emitted.

Suddenly, there was an unusual movement in the rustling undergrowth and out stepped Captain Andrews. He wiped the sweat from his brow and surveyed his surroundings carefully. He had been ordered to make a detour of a terrorist camp, and had now lost his sense of direction, as well as being cut off from his unit. He sat down suddenly and opened his flask, from which he drank eagerly.

As he drank, his thoughts went back to another time when he had been thirsty – but then his wife had served him, and he had drunk from a tea-table, not water from a tin flask in the misty swamps of the jungle.

The twitterings of the birds in the lofty tree-tops grew louder – evidently

¹, ² In these connections the reader is referred to Chapter 7, p. 144, where the value of parallelism is discussed.

some bird of prey had arrived on the scene, thought Andrews, and a lump rose in his throat at the thought that the birds would be singing in England, although – he suddenly laughed brokenly – it would be almost mid-winter by now. He pictured his family sitting round the fire, eating chestnuts and thinking and talking of him.

He pushed his hat further onto his head and wiped more sweat from his brow. He looked at his watch – remembering, as he did so, how many times his wife had told him not to bother so much about the time; and he thought bitterly of her favourite saying about there being all the time in the world, and that life was too short to be in such a hurry all the time.

He rose, and scrutinised the dense area of jungle ahead – he had not time to be homesick, he thought bitterly – he had work to do, and he would take a chance.

So, picking up his flask, he once more disappeared into the hot, lurid jungle undergrowth.

This kind of work may be undertaken with the ablest children from the second year onwards, though the ability to sustain an idea in quite this way is not normally to be expected from them until the third or even the fourth year. With semi-academic pupils (secondary modern A- and B-streams, approximately) we will need to go more slowly – single paragraphs may well suffice for the second year. With those whose technical command is still weaker, oral work of the kind suggested may be all that is appropriate until the third year, when some writing can be attempted on clear-cut, evocative theme sentences.

It is significant that the last illustration was basically narrative in approach, for it is in the sphere of narrative that many may most easily take to atmospheric writing. After the preliminary work on paragraphs the most obvious next step for academic pupils will be for them to use their new-found technique in narrative writing. They can learn just how much difference is made to a story by the appropriate atmosphere. In this connection some study of novels, in particular of the opening paragraphs, is often illuminating; see, for example, the beginning of Rosemary Sutcliffe's *Outcast*,¹ an admirable book for them to read when they are engaged on descriptive writing; for the less academic, something like Armstrong Sperry's *The Boy Who Was Afraid* or R. V. der Loeff's *Avalanche* may be more suitable.

The study of novels can easily be linked with the children's writing of their own novels, if this is thought desirable. Semi-academic pupils in the third year particularly enjoy studying the atmospheric opening of a good thriller or green-back Penguin and then trying to begin a similar story of their own. Not only does the framework of a short story or novel give them plenty of practice in descriptive writing of

¹ Part of this is quoted on p. 125.

all kinds, it also enables them to write about themselves in imaginary situations.

Whether or not one attempts anything so ambitious as a novel or short story, the writing of narrative – like that of single paragraphs – is much easier than attempting long descriptive compositions, for in both the former they are encouraged to select details of a scene and emphasise a mood which is already suggested to them, either by the nature of the narrative set, or by the key sentence supplied. In other words, they are spared for the moment the task of finding their own distinctive viewpoint for themselves and moulding the experience in consequence. This determining of their own ‘slant’ on the subject is rather too difficult a task for all but the ablest children in the second year.

I should like at this point to consider briefly several further examples of children’s work which reflect some of the more important aspects that I have attempted to cover in this chapter. Once again the illustrative material is drawn mostly from the work of academic children. This is because such work most economically draws attention to the points I wish to stress, and because much of it is entertaining in its own right; to illustrate effectively from the work of semi-academic or non-academic children, whose writing, though lively, is often much more diffuse, would require a chapter on its own. Again, if I have also drawn on the work of third- and fourth-year children, this is not because I have forgotten that the chapter has been primarily concerned with younger pupils, but in order to reflect realistically the fact that one is constantly revising and consolidating what has gone before.

The first example shows an able third-year boy describing a situation familiar to all, and making use of a straightforward contrast which helps him to intensify the atmosphere in each paragraph.

END OF TERM

The classroom is engulfed in a perpetual buzz of excited conversation. Care-free laughter and chattering find new-found audacity; no longer the threat of the master’s cane. The sound of the bell abruptly interrupts the conversation which immediately ceases, to give way to the tinkle of buckles, the banging of desk-lids, and then the conversation returns as before. A stream of trampling feet push eagerly through the door, coats are pulled haphazardly from their hooks and the noisy, happy children leave school in twos, threes or even more.

Another term has ended. The classroom is quiet and unmoving, with rows of empty desks partly surrounded by high, bare walls. Dusty outlines clearly define where maps and pictures have previously hung, while the empty vase on the teacher’s desk looks lonely and neglected. Through the large windows the vast expanse of the lawns and playground are deserted and unwanted.

All the school is silent as it prepares to enjoy a well deserved rest and to await the beginning of another term.

This is by no means outstanding writing for a pupil of this ability; 'find new-found' is obviously ugly, the reference to a master's cane is facile and inaccurate, there could have been a clearer emphasis on noise in the last part of the first paragraph and the final sentence is thoroughly clumsy. Similar weaknesses are apparent in the second paragraph. On the other hand, the passage represents a sound standard; each paragraph has a clearly emphasised mood and the details generally are quite well calculated to contribute to this.

The approach to the last subject was a relatively detached one – the personality and mood of the writer himself found little or no expression in the description. This was perhaps one of the reasons why the passage seems competent rather than entertaining. During the second and third years, however, we are anxious for the pupils to explore their experience in a more personal way, provided this causes them no embarrassment. (It is worth mentioning that the writer of 'End of Term' was at this stage still acutely self-conscious, after having been a very lively first-former, and found the prop of technique reassuring throughout his second and third years.) Some children will be as reluctant to write in an openly personal way as they would be to remove all their clothes in public, but most will find themselves able to explore their feelings about at least certain areas of their experience. The most mature will be the least easily embarrassed. In the next passage we see a girl, in the same class as the boy, facing up to a quite different kind of experience.

FLOATING BODY

I poked the bloated silver corpse, spotted with blobs of watery blood. A pathetic little body of shiny scales and goggling eyes. It bobbed away, its mouth opening and shutting. It looked like a lump of stained tin. But its eyes were staring unseeing at the sky. A strange smell hung around it. The smell of a pond on a hot afternoon. Touch it? No! My suspicion of death and graveyards kept me away. Surely it was alive, the sun was making its muscles move. And the water was carrying it away. But those glassy eyes still looked for something in the sky.

Before thinking about this, it may be helpful to look at another composition by the same girl:

A GROUP OF TREES

They are still and proud. The wind blows but he cannot bend their stark branches. They stand like something from a Constable painting, with the sun

making a misty halo around them. The ground is covered with a mossy shroud, brown and lifeless. It creeps around their bony roots. And clings like a parasite to their scarred trunks. The trees are lonely, they do not even bend towards each other for companionship. Their fingers jab at the sky, fork-like. It seems impaled on their stretching limbs; the clouds writhe and struggle away. Once they were young and slender and the whole harem of them bowed to their master, the wind. But now they are a circle of witches, bony and wrinkled, cracked like dried mud.

Superficially, these passages have much in common, particularly in the command of terse, highly evocative detail. To take the description of the trees first: this was written in the course of an outdoor lesson – and was sketched ‘from life’. The intention had been for the pupils to give expression to their own feelings, outside on a magnificent spring morning, as well as describing the scene. The writer here found herself unable to respond in the way intended – possibly she found the whole thing too much of a ‘put-up job’ – and fell back on straight description. Some of the detail is admirable but the whole lacks unity: the writer has really looked at the subject, but it has interested, rather than moved her. In this situation she has resorted to figurative language, some of it highly effective, but there is no one thing that she really wants to say about the trees – ‘they are still and proud’ . . . ‘lonely’ . . . ‘a circle of witches’. She is groping for the moulding point-of-view which eludes her. As an exercise in metaphor and simile, this is very good and there is obviously a place for such writing from time to time, but it fails by comparison with the first extract.

The whole difference between the two lies in the motivation of the writing. In contrast to the second, the writer had in the first something she wanted to say. The language is less obtrusive, the figurative expressions are here part of a personal vision rather than isolated and rather conscious ‘gems’. I am not really convinced that the trees resembled witches, but ‘like a lump of stained tin’ completely conveys the pathetically impaired glitter of the fish. Even the direct opening, ‘I poked’ is authentic in its suggestion of tentative movement, suppressed revulsion. Above all, this hangs together – the esemplastic power has produced a deceptively simple-seeming but entirely satisfying piece of writing.

When one seeks to encourage an element of controlled introspection in the writing of children of this age, one must tread lightly: for some, a subject such as ‘Floating Body’ can obviously be too emotionally charged for us to ask them to write about it. There are two ways of meeting this difficulty. In the first place, when one wants to encourage the pupils to explore a personal experience, one may indicate an area of

life, rather than an explicit theme – a type of experience rather than a specific topic. This will lead to a variety of responses but will enable the writer to make his own choice; to evade the potentially painful and yet find something personal to say. Secondly, there are areas of experience common to all, where a specific topic may be set and the individual child left to decide how deeply he will probe.

While recognising how real is the danger of trespassing on private experience, however, one has to realise that work in English can powerfully help the individual to come to terms with it, and to know himself better. One needs, moreover, to recognise that while the reluctance of some to write openly reflects an inability to face up to something – an inability we must respect – the inarticulateness of the adolescent has often a much less complex cause. For a time many seem unable to believe that they have anything of interest or value to communicate, and their self-consciousness need not necessarily cloak deep-seated fears, anxieties or any kind of traumatic experience.

Once such pupils are convinced that what they have to say is interesting and 'worth saying', they often find new confidence and zest for their work. In this connection, nothing is more reassuring than the discovery of their *normality*, of the fact that other people – infinite numbers of them – have had similar experiences.¹ This is of course where the study of literature has such value and if for a moment we digress into the consideration of 'comprehension', or response to literature, this may usefully serve to emphasise the fact that the various aspects of work in English are at every point closely inter-related.

The following is an example of the kind of topic which literature can illuminate at this stage, so that the inhibiting self-consciousness (which in part consists in the belief that an experience is 'private' simply because one assumes that it is unique, that it may mark one as being in some way *odd* –) is at least modified, if not altogether removed. The passage is taken from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 12, in the Penguin edition.²

The bell rang and then the classes began to file out of the rooms and along the corridors towards the refectory. He sat looking at the two prints of butter on his plate but could not eat the damp bread. The tablecloth was damp and limp. But he drank off the hot weak tea which the clumsy scullion, girt with a white apron, poured into his cup. He wondered whether the scullion's apron was damp too or whether all white things were cold and damp. Nasty Roche and Saurin drank cocoa that their people sent them in tins. They said they could not drink the tea; that it was hogwash. Their fathers were magistrates, the fellows said.

¹ I am here merely re-phrasing slightly the point made by C. S. Lewis (see the passage quoted on p. 76). I shall return to the idea later, when dealing with reading and drama.

² Two other passages are quoted in Chapter 8, p. 175 ff.

All the boys seemed to him very strange. They had all fathers and mothers and different clothes and voices. He longed to be at home and lay his head on his mother's lap. But he could not: and so he longed for the play and study and prayers to be over and to be in bed.

The reading of this type of passage often provokes a response more significant than any words – a nod of wry recognition. Its wryness, I think, is a reflection of the surprise of discovering that one's own experiences are very similar to those of many other people. The passage could equally well have been used in the course of work on empathy but was in this case used to illustrate just how isolated one may be in company. It had the further advantage of being impregnated throughout with a definite and readily accessible mood, which led me to use it when I was revising personal, descriptive writing with a fourth-year, semi-academic class.

The description that follows shows a boy who had previously shied away from this kind of topic – simply for fear of appearing odd – sufficiently reassured to write about one of those specific topics, drawn from experience common to nearly all of us, to which I have already referred.

THE FIRST LESSON

A new world, a strange, new world. A new school, a strange, new school. A classroom full of people you have never met before, people who seem more able and cleverer than you. You're not able to concentrate, your mind wanders onto other things – 'What will the next lesson be like? . . . When will the bell go? . . . Wonder what that building over there is?'

Then the teacher's voice seems to boom out a question at you. You quiver with fright, and after a moment mumble out the answer and pray that it is the right one. If it isn't, you become a fool, in the eyes of the rest of the class, if it is, you get a feeling of superiority over the rest of the class.

You have answered your question, you look at the clock and see that there are only a few minutes of the lesson left, and you fall back into your own world of daydreams. You dream of home, and dinner, of the stove with the saucepans boiling upon it, of the kitchen table and chairs, and . . .

Your dream is suddenly shattered by the bell announcing the end of the lesson. Slowly, you close your books, and carefully pack them into your satchel, and walk from the room. You pause for a moment and reflect on the lesson. Your day-dreaming, and the question, the question on which your destiny hung. You had answered correctly – just – and you feel an air of satisfaction. Now you are walking on to another lesson, more daydreams, and more questions.

In the passage just quoted we have seen a boy of some ability demonstrating that he has learnt in the previous two years something of mood and organisation, and at last proving this in a piece of vivid personal writing.

Where one is seeking, with less able second- and third-years, to get the right concentration and development of mood, the gambits – ‘How I hate . . .’ and ‘How I love . . .’ often stimulate sustained writing on interesting personal themes. In other words they fulfil the two necessary conditions: they provide the necessary practice in technique; they are drawn from the kind of experience that it is helpful for children of this age to explore. Obviously, the extent to which the children’s writing succeeds in meeting both demands at the same time will be very variable but the next two short pieces are fair examples; technically they show an ability to sustain a simple theme, and they are also personal and lively. The first is by a second-year girl of B-stream grammar school ability; the second by a rather less able third-year boy. Both are genuine *cris de cœur*!

MY BROTHER KNITS

Believe it or not, my brother knits, not like anyone else, but he knits on, in his own sweet way.

He sits on the chair, his face grimly set and he knits, jabbing at the tatty old bit of wool, poking out his tongue at each stitch he takes, dropping a stitch and calling for Mummy to pick it up. He is a sissy, sitting there not climbing trees like any other boy, but sitting, huddled up, knitting, just like a girl. I climb trees and play up more than he does, the silly nit.

Every time he finishes a row he shows everyone, even the dog, and gets praise, too. I’m jealous, I hate him, the horrid little fat thing.

Whereas the last was a subtle variation of the kind of gambit suggested, the second is perfectly straightforward:

I HATE

I hate waking up at seven o’clock on a rainy morning to take my papers. When the alarm goes I pretend to myself not to hear it, because it only seems ten minutes since I went to bed. The rain seems to stop me getting up and I think of myself putting soggy papers through letter boxes which stick and take a lot of bother besides the soaking I will get trying to open them.

Then I pull myself out of bed and drowsily dress myself still thinking of the soaking I will get outside.

By the middle of the third year the children of good academic ability, who have by now been working on this kind of writing for a year or more, should be capable of evoking quite vividly a considerable range of their own experience. The three poems which follow may give some indication of the standard attainable at this stage.

The first is relatively detached and resulted from an exercise on the detailed development of basically simple ideas. On this occasion the class were also given some instruction on climax, together with the subject outline as here set down:

THE WAVE

1. Wave grows.
2. Climax – moment of impact.
3. Diminuendo.

Within the context of atmospheric and personal descriptive writing there is no need for relatively frequent practice over a period of years to involve monotony. One of the ways in which this may be avoided is by giving different kinds of framework: in this way the continuity remains unbroken, and the pupils' command of this kind of writing is steadily developed, while their interest is maintained by a variety of challenges. Both academic and semi-academic pupils may thus be helped to develop and sustain their ideas and to discover just how much there is to say. In this particular instance, the response to a relatively sophisticated outline was unusually good: the following example was better than most, but not by any great margin. This was written by a girl; all three examples are from third-year children of sound or good (the last poem) grammar school ability.

THE WAVE

Somewhere, out there in the infinite
greenness of the sea, a wave is born,
A wave that is to die,
To die in the hands of its enemy
The rock,
The bare jagged rock that stands proudly,
Proudly challenging all oncoming waves
To battle,
To battle to the death.

The wave rolls gaily into shore,
Then, it sees it,
It sees the rock of death.
With foolish confidence it accepts the
Challenge,
Eagerly it gathers speed as it races to
Battle,
Knowing not what will happen,
Knowing not of death.

Then with a burst of speed it rushes to
The rock,
The rock that is ready with its
Executioner's axe,
Ready to strike,
Too late!
Too late the wave sees its death and tries to turn
In vain.

For in frenzied panic it hits the rock
 White foam is hurled into the air
 Glistening like diamonds.
 For seconds it hovers above the rock and
 Then
 With a clap of thunder it dashes itself
 against the bare black spine of the rock.
 The wave's arm reaches out to the rock
 But finds nothing.

The rock laughs knowingly for it has claimed
 Another victim.
 As the wave retreats its fingers claw
 At the sea bed,
 but, alas,
 it slithers into the sea,
 Into the sea its birthplace,
 Into the sea its grave.

Whereas this poem was relatively impersonal, perhaps even rather consciously technical in approach, it was an exercise that had clearly been enjoyed. The following two poems, both on the same subject, are much more personal, much less detached; though in both there remain traces of conscious application of technique, the writers are grappling very successfully with a familiar experience. Both poems reveal a well-sustained control of mood and well-chosen 'significant' detail.

FALLING ASLEEP

Exhausted and weary,
 utterly amazed at actually being able to stay awake at all.
 Eyelids heavy,
 eyesight difficult to focus on the words,
 Left hand, which supports the chin,
 has fallen asleep,
 So has the left foot
 and all the toes as well.
 Cover of book falls and closes
 – startling effects created in the mind.
 Flip it open again!
 Zone of silence shattered by footsteps
 clicking on the pavement at the front.
 Total distraction . . .
 wild thoughts flash through the mind,
 hard to concentrate once more on the novel,
 Elbow very tender and sore
 – shift it about a bit!
 Just impossible to wriggle into a comfortable position.
 Head lowered onto pillow,
 reading harassed by not being able to read left-hand page.
 Spine bent back,

of illustrations with yet another quotation from work by a fourth-year pupil. I am persuaded to incline it partly because of the pleasure it gives me, and partly because it exemplifies the qualities with which I have been most concerned throughout this chapter. Although it is immature in its almost bewildering profusion of detail – in the rather indiscriminate richness of its figurative expression – most of the detail contributes to the picture as a whole, just as most of the figures of speech emphasise the pervading mood the writer is trying to convey. Basically, I suppose, I offer it to the reader because of the sheer zest of the writing, beside which the faults seem insignificant.

BLACK COUNTRY SCENE

The dark rain clouds, which swirled around the tall, black stacks like miniature whirlpools, were blackened still more by the oily, thick clouds of smoke which belched out from the soot-corroded stacks. These stacks stood up like two frozen fingers against the skyline, looming out of the mist-like drizzle which drifted around them. Small tongues of flame appeared from the stacks, only to disappear again like small children playing hide and seek.

The rain ran off the glistening slate roof in rivers of blackened water. These rivulets swirled around pieces of broken slate like a river swirling around jagged rapids. The hum of the machines mingled with the patter of the rain-drops bouncing off the dirt grimed skylights which looked up at the scurrying chariots of cloud like big black eyes. Rain drops hung precariously from the rusty, soot-covered guttering, which bulged out in the middle like an over-fed man.

Instead of running through the drainpipe, the water ran down the outside, spiralling round its rusty exterior. The rain ran down the grimy windows, leaving little white furrows down its black surface. Particles of dust settled like a blanket on the already black, dust-mantled old houses. Bent backed, dust-grimed workers, clad in black, tattered overcoats, their lunch bags under bent, aching arms, shuffled out of the sodden, cracked oak door. The whistle of the factory cut through the noise of the giant moulds like a knife through butter. Workers came pouring out of the gaping doors like armies of black ants, their collars turned up against the driving rain.

A black old engine chugged its way past the near deserted factory, its white plume of smoke mingling with the black plume still belching from the majestic stacks.

To conclude: while the material used in the second year is such as to exercise the child's imagination more extensively, but along the same lines as previously, the onset of self-consciousness and the consequent changes in the characteristic attitude of the child towards his experience make the second year, or the latter part of it, a suitable time to introduce the concept of FORM in writing.

The continued disciplining of the imagination and the exploration of various modes of perception remain the starting point, but this discipline is no longer enough. Controlled introspection can play a valuable

part, but we need to remind ourselves that what we are legitimately concerned with is *art* – mere verbal orgasms, mere overflows of subliminalia are not enough. Through the ordering of the experience in formal ways the child gains satisfaction of a kind far deeper than consists in intellectual showing-off. When, however, the choice is between honesty and authenticity on the one hand, and formal correctness on the other, it is the former that we must chiefly aim to preserve. The continuation of the imaginative discipline begun in the first year helps us enormously in this, and in fact ensures that we are rarely faced with this distressing choice – for we are merely encouraging the children to grapple with first-hand experience in a more adult way.

3 – The Final Stage: Imagination and Morality

Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto.

Terence

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause . . .

P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*

The difference between thinking about things and thinking about persons is something that has to be learnt, and many never learn it . . .

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*

We come now to the final stage of our work in imaginative composition, which is normally undertaken with children between the ages of thirteen and fifteen – according to the speed at which they have absorbed and profited by the earlier types of exercise. Once again, it is undesirable to attempt too hard and fast a division into particular ages: the important thing is the following of a sequence in which the separate stages are adjusted to the mental, moral, physical and social development of the pupils.¹

Before describing the work, I need however to make clear what appear to me the significant characteristics of children of this age-range – significant, that is, in determining the nature of the work to be undertaken at this stage in their development. First we may say that children of this age are becoming, as they move into the difficult period of adolescence, much more vividly aware not only of internal stresses but also of their relations with other people,² whose behaviour interests them deeply. The greater complexity and disintegration of their lives and the sharper intensity of their personal problems lead normally to a

¹ See Introduction, p. 10: 'that method which is of greatest benefit to the child seems to be precisely the method which makes for the greatest vitality and sensitivity of language.'

² Our work at this stage may well be hampered by co-educational organisation. For the education of the emotions – which is what we are now concerned with – the attempt to teach both boys and girls together, on the grounds of chronological parity, will never succeed entirely. When one tries, with a class of thirteen-year-olds, to choose material equally interesting to both boys and girls, one often succeeds in interesting neither.

much greater degree of inhibition and self-consciousness; hence the apparent indifference of such children to other people. These are facts so self-evident in dramatic work that one wonders how they can ever be ignored, but they can, and we must beware of this.

A further characteristic of this age is of fundamental importance. Morality, for most children of average and below average intelligence – as for most adults – is largely a matter of precepts and rules of thumb which, though they may be modified, or even rejected, are very rarely questioned fundamentally: rejection, when it does take place, is emotional rather than intellectual. This morality is clearly shown, for instance, in the unthinking value-judgments which constitute in the adult mind mental clichés that are all too effective barriers against independent thought.

There is a clear connection, here, with what Professor Allport has called 'word fetishism':

It takes a few years for (children) to learn that a name is not a thing-in-itself . . . verbal realism may never be fully shaken off. The rigidity of linguistic categories may continue in adult thinking. To some adults 'communist' or 'Jew' is a dirty word – and a dirty thing – an indissoluble unity, as it may be to a child.¹

Similarly, Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* quotes a selection of words, expressing approval and disapproval, which are popular in editorials of daily newspapers and which illustrate admirably the way in which the press gives wider currency to this tabloid thinking.²

All this is not, as it may seem to be, straying far from the subject. I have already made strong claims for the part played by the imagination in the development of personality and the imaginative work now to be attempted represents the culmination and integration of all that has gone before. The aim at this stage is that of Kierkegaard:

'What I want is to spur people into becoming moral characters.'

The reference to emotive language and irrational thought, cursory though it was, may yet suffice to suggest obvious difficulties in our way. How, in view of the relatively small influence of reason on conduct, can we spur people into becoming moral characters? We are not going to teach by precept – since this involves an appeal to reasoning, to abstract principles. Moreover, such an approach would have the additional and serious disadvantage of involving an imposition of adult standards of one particular kind which would provoke a justifiably

¹ Professor G. W. Allport: *The Nature of Prejudice*, p. 307.

² Much has been written about emotive language but for an introduction to this few have surpassed the excellent chapter in Thouless' *Straight and Crooked Thinking*, E.U.P., part of which is quoted in Chapter 9 (p. 205) together with the passage from *The Uses of Literacy* referred to above (see p. 210).

hostile reaction in our pupils. To attempt to 'teach morality' in this way would be hardly less rash than to assume we could achieve our aim merely by force of example.¹

I believe that the only satisfactory method of making a real impact on the moral standards of the children is through the imagination: firstly, by utilising their already lively interest in people's behaviour; secondly, by turning their inability to think abstractly into an advantage. Thus we will confine ourselves to concrete examples; we will teach in parables. We cannot hope to change them into philosophers but we can deepen their insight into people.

In their second year children were set subjects which aimed at developing their consciousness of themselves in real-life situations and at extending this self-knowledge by imagining themselves in imaginary but possible situations. Following this came the application of conscious technique in moulding and shaping their descriptive work. They should now be ready to attempt subjects the aim of which is to make 'reciprocity of viewpoint' part of their own attitude to people.²

In aiming at the deepening and extension of the adolescent's insight into other people's feelings and behaviour, one concentrates equally upon the imaginative experience of writing and that of reading about them. By our exercises in writing about people we are attempting indirectly to inculcate a sense of what Professor M. V. C. Jeffreys has called 'the sacredness of humanity' – and the value of the individual. 'Humanity' – in the mass – is, in fact, a term too vast, and too likely to lead to a variety of misleading and purely emotional (often sentimental) attitudes, for us to think in precisely those terms. We can only have a proper feeling for humanity if we feel deeply for the individual.³

The need to translate abstract problems and principles into something more concrete – to give them more meaning by bringing them down to a personal, individual level – is particularly urgent today. The publicity given in recent years to the wretched existence of millions of people in underdeveloped countries has undoubtedly begun to make a notable impact; the support already given to organisations like The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief bears witness to an awakening social conscience. Nevertheless we need to do more: terms like 'underdeveloped countries' can be dangerously meaningless; the increased

¹ In this connection see also p. 160 ff. where the rôle of literature is discussed.

² As Piaget has shown in *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, the attainment of a truly adult morality is dependent on passing from a morality based on unilateral respect to a morality based on a real reciprocity, or mutual respect.

³ I do not mean to imply that this is something Professor Jeffreys has omitted to clarify – on the contrary, see, for example, *Glaucon*, p. 11 ff.

support people are giving may not reflect anything more enlightened than an uncomfortable feeling of guilt at being so much better off. This is a starting point but the problem has not been faced squarely until the wretchedness of the 'starving millions' has become real to us.

Some of the most heartening practical support has come from the efforts of schools and we have at least brought the problems home to the children at the right age. We must not assume, however, that because they are impressionable they will necessarily have been impressed more deeply than some of their elders, who give money partly in order to be able to enjoy in peace of mind their own relative prosperity – in order, in fact, to evade the contemplation of something so painful. Of course, it may be argued in their defence that they have done the only practical thing open to them. This is largely true, but it is misleading in its assumption of the supreme value of the 'practical gesture'. If we are attempting to educate in the fullest sense of the word we must avoid making any such assumption. By endeavouring to develop the child's imaginative sympathy by specific exercises wherein he is led to contemplate the problem in concrete, personal terms we are making a real contribution towards the true enlightenment of the next generation. Not only this, we are ensuring that his practical, fund-raising activities are properly motivated.

If any justification of literature in schools were needed, I would appeal first to its rôle in the extension of the individual's sympathy. It is important to notice the mode of this extension – literature develops insight not by explanation, but by subjecting us to experiences which involve imaginative cognition. This, I believe, is the kind of knowledge which may make a real impact on the way of life of those who can use their imagination to realise the essence of truths which, stated abstractly, would otherwise be mere theory – indigestible intellectual food.¹

A second justification of literature lies in its ability to objectify some of the tension and pressures, the stresses and strains of adolescence. As C. S. Lewis, in *Surprised by Joy*,² puts it:

Nothing, I suspect, is more astonishing [and, I would say, *comforting*], in any man's life than the discovery that there do exist people very, very like himself.

The classroom is not the best place to discuss such topics explicitly, but the peculiar virtue of literature is its implicitness. Many of the fixations, the retrogressions, the wasteful misconceptions of adolescents

¹ Cf. Pomponatius, speaking of abstract ideas: 'Universale in particulari speculatur'. Quoted by Coleridge (*Note books of S.T.C.*, Section 957). This argument is developed at greater length in Chapter 8, p. 162.

² Fontana Books, p. 106.

seem to stem from the private nature of their experience, the disturbing and disquieting sense of isolation which hedges them round. Some seven years ago Edward Blishen expressed a wish that 'there were more books that dealt honestly and imaginatively and cathartically with the adolescent's own environment, his own difficulties'; certainly there is little enough of this in the books written for children. One answer, to be recommended for further exploration, is the use of autobiographies and semi-autobiographical fiction.

Literature cannot really be separated from the imaginative composition we wish to encourage: frequently the quality of the children's writing will be a fair reflection of their reading experience along the same lines. Thus, for example, the quality of the following was partly the result of the stimulus of reading Orwell's essay *Marrakesch*:

EARTH

He looked at the earth. That lumpy, brown, dry earth that had given him his living for so long. Before, when he looked at it, he had felt resentment – resentment at having one poor crop after another; at toiling throughout the year, digging, scraping it with a plough, sowing, preserving all the better parts with a little water. And for what? To dig up a few weeds, and even fewer stalks of corn; to trudge to the market, sell it for what little he could get and, after living reasonably 'well' for one week, to starve for fifty-one.

Now, looking at it again, and at his rags and old wooden shack, seeing his children playing in the lumps of earth, he wondered at his new emotion. His mind flickered over his life; the toil, the heartbreak, the beatings when, as a child, he was too hungry and tired to work, and he realized that this new emotion was resignation. He knew that he would no longer fight against his station in life, but would accept the starvation, humiliation, and suffering it brought.¹

The children, then, are – to use the common phrase – to imagine themselves 'in other people's shoes', but more than this, if what they are doing is to exercise fully the faculty of empathy, they are to imagine themselves as 'other people in other people's shoes', i.e. with all those faults and different characteristics which often seem annoying to us.

If we are to qualify the intolerance of the adolescent, an indirect approach seems desirable. We must teach but not preach. In Chapter 1 I attacked words which had no real meaning, which paid insufficiently close attention to what was described, and I did so on the grounds of *inaccuracy*. It is the same now: the schoolboy term 'big-head' is objectionable, not because of any crudity of expression, but because of the inaccuracy of its assumptions about the cause and nature of conceit – because, in fact, of its crudity of *thought*.

Instead of accepting such terms, then, the aim is so to develop the child's perceptiveness that he can reach something of the reality these

¹ Written by a fourth-year girl of grammar school A-stream ability.

expressions so effectively hide. The teenager with a powerful motor-bike need be neither a hero nor a reckless idiot: stated thus it seems obvious but until one has attempted to probe more deeply, to *feel with* such a youth, one cannot really achieve an extension of sympathy sufficient to modify conventional attitudes. We need to explore what lies behind the 'craze' for speed – is it really 'speed' that is the essential thing? This kind of topic is obviously close to the interests of many adolescents but it is also valuable in another way. A curious fact about children is that they often exhibit an extreme intolerance which reflects parental attitudes in a more rigid form. Thus, for example, the subject of motor-cycle enthusiasts is likely to provoke surprisingly strong condemnation amongst those who have accepted their parents' views. Often, of course, their very positiveness masks an underlying uncertainty or a repression of a desire to emulate those they condemn. These reasons are sufficient justification, surely, for anything which can really deepen their insight into others.

While the extension of moral perceptiveness is the main aim, the methods suggested seem to have further real advantages. In the first place, the children's own reading is made more meaningful and this contributes notably towards the same end. Secondly, by examining current attitudes and stock judgments, we throw light on language itself and build up a healthy resistance to the influences of mass media. And thirdly, by providing subject matter well suited to children of this age, we are able to ensure that the improvement of their writing techniques is an interesting and sometimes even an exciting process.

It is time to get down to concrete examples, though the reader who has followed the argument this far will probably have already thought of some for himself. Before doing so, however, I must stress that the disciplined and methodical imaginative preparation is continued in precisely the same way as before.

In the first place, news items of various kinds are a most useful source of suggestions. Furthermore they often make easier the transition from the previous stage to this one: thus they may be designed to call for description of a traditional type, coupled with an insight into people that we hope will involve more and more the empathetic faculty. An example that springs readily to mind is the evacuation of the inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha, following the eruption of its volcano, and their resettlement here. Obviously, with the ablest children we have here an opportunity for a great variety of exercises; quite apart from trying to achieve our particular aims, we can give them practice, for instance, in the whole business of handling a complex narrative. With the semi-

academic children we may have to limit ourselves to specific aspects, whether descriptive or narrative. With the non-academic children there may be little possibility of extended written work but the preparatory period of intense concentration – to which they, like the others, should now be thoroughly accustomed – coupled with shrewd questioning by the teacher, can lead to excellent oral or dramatic work. Each, according to his ability, can participate in a new experience.

Other possible subjects include: park-keeper after gala-day; tired bus-conductor on late special; good/bad student waiting for examination results; thief in dock; magistrate sentencing thief; child out late; mother whose child is out late; guest speaker at speech day; prizewinner at speech day; child who has not received prize at speech day; deaf person on receiving first effective hearing aid; salesman too old to work; miner trapped underground.

One could prolong the list indefinitely, but the approach should be clear: the topics should lead the children to think deeply about other people in a variety of situations. I would stress, however, the value of exercises which involve them in a participation in diametrically opposed positions – e.g. child/parent, teacher. This can be done obliquely, by introducing the parent, as in the Tristan example, without stressing the *parental* factor. This obliqueness is valuable since otherwise there is a considerable risk that the children will be influenced by what-they-feel-they-ought-to-feel, or by what-they-feel-the-teacher-thinks-they-ought-to-feel. One must beware of this kind of suggestion.

I have so far said nothing about stimuli used. As in the earlier stages poetry and pictures are probably the most economical – and for this work photographs can also be used most effectively. Two further points require emphasis, however. The brief newspaper cutting – which hides more than it reveals – is often a challenging stimulus. Secondly, this work links up easily and fruitfully with work on novels or class-readers, where comprehension and creation become very hard to separate.¹

Before concluding I shall quote four examples of work on these lines by academic or semi-academic pupils. All of these demonstrate the particular kind of insight at which we are aiming. The fact that the writers are relatively accomplished does not reflect a disingenuous attempt on my part to prove that all children will be capable of reaching a comparable standard; the kind of perceptiveness which here finds very articulate expression is something which is open to most children who have any imaginative capacity at all, however, though with the less

¹ This idea will be developed in Chapter 8.

able the vision will be less competently sustained, and with the weakest it may find most useful expression in discussion work. If the children's imagination has been consistently exercised for four years the insight which the oral work will reveal should be of precisely the same kind as that shown in the passages I have chosen to quote.

Once again I shall not attempt to analyse the writing, but this should not be taken to imply that criteria to which I have earlier attached importance have been forgotten. While the insight itself is the essential thing, we shall also look, where appropriate, for the same accuracy as was required in the first year; for the same selection of meaningful detail and control of mood, and so on, as were demanded in the second and third years.

Example 1 was written by a semi-academic girl under the stimulus of a poem on a similar subject; a brief reference in the local newspaper led to Example 3. For the other two no specific stimulus was used, but there was some preliminary discussion before the period of preparation began. All the writers were fourth-year pupils.

Example 1

DISABLED

Lying there staring at the ceiling he thought of the days when he used to jump up to see if he could touch it, now he couldn't touch anything. His hands, arms and knees were a thing of the past, his youth was not, but what did that matter any more, nothing mattered. The young girls who passed his window, talking gaily, were just the same age as he, but they couldn't bear to even look at him, let alone speak a few kind words. Oh, how he longed to speak to someone.

In the old days he was the most sought-after young man, huh! They all encouraged him to join-up, so he did, for their sake. They were waiting to pat him on the back, too, when he came back, that was before they saw him. Then the crowd gradually dispersed, no-one wanted to talk to a cripple, or pat his back, ha, - frightened the rest of him might come off, I suppose.

The only person who looked after him was his wife. Yes, he had a wife, and she certainly didn't pretend to be the loving kind, either. Three times a day she came in, once to wash him and give him breakfast and then twice with his other two meals. She never spoke unless to give him instructions, and then her voice was hard and brittle. She hated him, now, for marrying her, and he could see that she was the type that never forgave.

Often he heard her laughing and talking with a young man. Young man! Wasn't that what he was? Why couldn't anyone see him as a young man and not as a cripple to be shied away from?

Oh, how he hated people, the only thing he loved was his dog. His dog never saw him as a cripple, so long as he loved him that was enough. He was a bright little dog, too, but then his dear wife said he was a nuisance and took him away. That night he lay there with every single bit of hate he had, burning with terrible intensity in his veins. She couldn't do this to him, he wouldn't let her, he hated her, wanted to kill her and would if he got the

chance. His eyes burned bright with the dreadful hate he had inside him. Why should he be here and not able to do anything? But what was the use? . . . He was . . . nothing.

Example 2

THE LONELY OLD MAN

The old man tottered towards the friendly light in the distance. To him that light meant friends and a little company for a short while every now and then, to take away some of the loneliness of his fast decreasing years. He pushed open the door of the fish and chip shop, and a warm cosy atmosphere embraced his cold body.

He was grateful to see a queue in front of him for it meant he could stay all that much longer.

As he rested against the steamy wall, his walking stick at his side, he watched the playful drops of condensation chase each other down the window. The playfulness reminded him of bygone days and tears pricked the corners of his weary eyes.

The proprietor and his wife behind the counter smiled at the familiar face at the end of the queue. They knew that his world had died with his wife, and his children had married and left him, so they didn't begrudge the old man a rest there for a while.

At last, when all the customers both in front and behind him had been served, the old man moved to the counter.

'What tonight, Fred, the usual?' said the proprietor.

'Please,' said a sad, lonely voice.

The proprietor put him an extra few chips and a large fish into the bag and wrapped them up.

Fred handed over the precious coins that a mean government gave him every Tuesday, and took the warm packet that warmed his hand and inside as he ate one.

Slowly and regretfully his wrinkled hand reached for the door handle that co-operated with his light pull. He half-turned and nodded a goodnight to the friendly couple behind the counter, and they smiled an acknowledgement.

He turned back to the door and moved slowly out, tapping his sticks on the stone slabs outside as he went homewards to solitude once more.

Example 3

A LOST WORLD

Her eyes slowly passed over the shadowed alley-ways, which led off from the street at diverse angles, meditating inwardly upon each corner, each house, each familiar patch of land. All were so familiar, so much a part of her very existence. She knew what lay beyond each door and around each corner. They were all immovably imprinted upon her subconscious memory.

Then, she fixed her gaze upon a building several yards away, on the opposite side of the street. Her eyes became misted with tears. The four walls inside which she had created a home for her family, were crumbling under the hammer of the demolition men. They were destroying all she had struggled to create, with blows rained upon the brickwork from enormous, mis-shapen lumps of metal on the ends of wooden stakes.

Did they think that they were demi-gods on golden thrones above everyone else? They had no right to force her to begin life again in a block of modern flats, away from her friends and former neighbours. She would have to start destroying the inhibitions of people, who would look down upon her because she had come from an area of slums. What did they know of the struggles she must face because they suddenly had decided that her home was an eyesore?

'Life begins at forty.' How many times she had heard that statement? Friends had said it countless times as an encouragement to her. Did they think that four words could throw off all the despair she felt at having to begin to build up a new home and circle of friends?

Having thrown the letter in the fire, she had felt a great satisfaction, but in the back of her mind she knew that all her efforts were futile. She had seen her 'life' signed away and yet had been able to do nothing to prevent it. Despair over-ran her. She wanted to do something, even if she only protested to the council. However, she knew that such efforts were useless and of no account and she dismissed them from her mind.

Tears brimmed over, and sighing and sobbing intermittently she turned. Her pride being her only main-stay, she stood erect and walked swiftly away. She would show them that they could not break her so easily. No high and mighty townplanner was going to destroy what she had built up, just because he had a sudden whim to demolish her house. After all, the house was not the home. Just because the house was gone the home need not necessarily be demolished too. She would fight if need be for that home and her family. The flat tossed to her as a compensation would become her home and her family's home. She would have the last laugh yet!

Example 4

WORLD WITHOUT EYES

The air was cold and still, probably like any normal December evening, but tonight there was a sensation of emptiness and isolation all around me. I could hear the noise of traffic pushing its way slowly homeward; I could hear people talking as they, too, returned home, but tonight they seemed in another world, and I was cut off from them.

The rhythmic tap-tap of my stick seemed hollow as it echoed into the fog. Yes, it was foggy; I knew that for I had that dry, choked feeling in my throat that you always do get when it's foggy, and my eyes ached, not a stabbing pain but a dull ache that stops you thinking and makes everything seem to be going too slowly.

Tap . . . Tap . . . not far now. I wonder when someone will repair those last few railings. They always clatter like a lot of milk-crates whenever I hit them with my stick; it makes me feel as if everyone is staring at me; it will be even worse tonight with everything so still and quiet.

It can't be far now. Must be the fog. I suppose it does slow you up a bit. I'll try walking more quickly. I wonder what Jeanette will say when I get in? Let's have a look at the time. Look? See? What is the difference? I've often used those words - never thought how stupid they are. It always seems so natural to say that. I suppose I mean feel the time. Blast! Can't be bothered to take my glove off. Still, knowing the time isn't much use. You can't change it, and I won't get home any quicker.

The street seems long. I wonder if I am moving, or are my feet just moving and the pavement moving in the opposite direction, like tame mice on those little wheels? I once had a couple of tame mice. Had them for my tenth

birthday, or was it my ninth? Our next-door neighbour gave them to me. One was pure white with little red eyes and one little whisker that was bent at the end. The hours I spent trying to straighten that one whisker!

Surely the end is here somewhere? Perhaps I've walked too far – yes, that must be it. I'll turn round and walk back towards the town. I'll stop someone and ask them where I am. The fog must be bad. I can't hear any traffic, or any people. Still, can't expect many to be out on a night like this.

I wonder if I'm dead? Come off it.

There's bound to be a gateway somewhere. I'll go and ask someone where I am.

I wonder what it is like to die? Everything can't just stop because your heart does. I wonder if you do go to heaven, or hell? I always used to imagine heaven with little cobbled streets of gold with shops with bulls-eye windows and signs written in old English.

I suppose when you die you just carry on walking, on and on.

Hallo! A gateway! Might as well go in. At least the gate doesn't feel like gold; the knocker doesn't either. In fact I'd say it was decidedly rusty, rather like my own. Ah well, here goes.

'Excuse me, but . . .'

'Dad! You're back early!'

In conclusion, let it be clearly understood that the progression outlined in these three chapters is not intended to be a basic course. The exercises, however, at perhaps fortnightly intervals, are designed to provide a constantly recurring element of the work – so that the training of the imagination is undertaken in a thoroughly methodical way over the first few years. Though this training may occupy only a small proportion of the total time devoted to English teaching, it can have an outstanding effect not merely upon English teaching as a whole, but upon the development of the children.

Thus much is effected by works of imagination; – that they carry the mind out of self, and show the possible of the good and the great in the human character . . . In the imagination of man exist the seeds of all moral and scientific improvement . . . The imagination is the distinguishing characteristic of man as a progressive being: and I repeat that it ought to be carefully guided and strengthened as the indispensable means and instrument of continued amelioration and refinement.¹

¹S. T. Coleridge, *Essays and Lectures*, Everyman, 1909, p. 300 – Lecture XI – 'Use of works of Imagination in Education'.

4 – *The Dramatic Experience*

... Here is one way in which they can be helped to reconcile the reality of the world outside with their own private worlds. Once this begins, education has something on which to build. In short, drama, along with poetry and the other arts, is not a 'frill' which the less able can safely omit or relegate to a minor position on some Friday afternoons. Art is not an expensive substitute for reality. It is through creative arts, including the arts of language, that young people can be helped to come to terms with themselves more surely than by any other route.

Half our Future, p. 157

I believe it was Sir Thomas Browne who said that he abstained from discussing matters of religion, not from any lack of conviction, but for fear that the truth might suffer as a result of his imperfect advocacy. This is precisely how I feel about drama. It remains my conviction that the teacher should consult the experts¹ upon this special subject. It is obviously not possible, in a single chapter, to give any indication of the range of approaches that may be adopted. Moreover, I am acutely conscious that the teaching of drama is an intensely individual business: what works with one teacher will not be an effective method in the hands of another; but two quite different approaches may lead to strangely similar results. Most successful drama teaching reflects a pragmatic and eclectic approach which suits the individual concerned – not even Rose Bruford, I imagine, teaches 'pure Rose-Bruford-method'.

It is with considerable misgivings, therefore, that I venture upon this subject. Venture I must, however, not in order to propagate my own curious and eclectic method, but rather to stress the vital importance of the dramatic experience and to indicate at least some of the ways this is related to other work in English. In general, precise details of teaching method will be outside my scope: my purpose is more evangelical than expository, and it seems more sensible for the reader to refer to the sources from which I culled most of my ideas, instead of relying upon my own version – or perversion – of them.

¹ See the section of the Bibliography that deals with drama, on p. 246.

The general tendency in drama work in English schools at last shows signs of swinging away from play reading round the class towards some more 'free' dramatic activity, but there can be no doubt that a great deal of unsuitable material is still treated in the old way – Shakespeare is quite often introduced in the second year, and not only with pupils in selective schools. Much of the reluctance to attempt any kind of free drama is understandable: the old play reading and school play productions are *known* situations; to abandon these is to 'lay oneself open' – to let go of the bar and strike out in the deep end. The apparent chaos that characterises 'free' drama work may well be expected to deter those used to purely formal teaching situations, and it must be admitted that in some cases what masquerades under the name of free drama may be little more than superficial, exuberant tomfoolery.

The teacher's approach is bound to depend on his attitude to discipline, and this once more underlines the folly of suggesting that any particular method is right and the rest wrong. If he can tolerate a good deal of noise and – most important – if the time allocation is sufficiently generous to make it feasible, he may from the beginning take a back seat, waiting for an autonomous, co-operative group discipline to evolve within his class. Experience shows that the teacher who can endure muddle, chaos, noise, superficiality for a considerable period – perhaps a whole year – will find that such a discipline does in fact develop. Most of the outstanding drama teachers I have known have operated rather in this way, as unobtrusive spectators, occasionally attempting, by means of a provocative question, to lead the children into a more concentrated imaginative activity, but for the most part content to wait until the children come for advice – having learnt that noise and superficiality are unsatisfying. There is no doubt that the first requests of this kind mark the beginning of a new phase of more purposeful activity. There can be little doubt, either, that the time thus 'wasted' – in the eyes of the sceptic – has in fact been well spent;¹ though there is often no dramatic 'end-product' worth mentioning, there is a cumulative liberation. But it takes time, and rigorous self-discipline on the teacher's part, to keep himself from interfering before his help is actively sought.

Many will, I believe, move towards this approach as their experience grows, but for a variety of reasons the first steps are perhaps better

¹ 'Some of the best modern teachers believe that there should be two years in which students practise movements to free themselves in every possible way, and that only after this should they begin to speak and act. In a lesser degree the idea can be applied to children, freedom in movement leading to freedom in speech.' Rose Bruford, *Speech and Drama*, Methuen, p. 4.

undertaken in a more controlled situation. In the first place, there may be insufficient provision of open space to allow really 'free' dramatic activity for a whole class of children; secondly, the teacher may feel – often with some justification – that he hasn't enough time to allow the children to evolve their own discipline in this way; thirdly, his own personality may be unsuited to such an approach – at any rate at first; and fourthly, he may feel that he wants to combat at the outset the superficiality of 'cops-and-robbers'.

It should be noted, however, that superficiality is far from being the most significant characteristic of children's dramatic play – this has, on the contrary, a quality of involvement and a sheer zest that we should want to capitalise. Fortunately a more controlled teaching situation, which yet enables us to utilise these characteristics, is open to us – if we approach drama in the first two years of secondary school through the *discipline of mime*.

My own preference for this method is – it must again be stressed – a personal one; it reflects the kind of teaching situation I am used to, the amount of time I have had available and, above all, the kind of person I am. More than this, however, the discipline of mime has certain very obvious points of contact with the kind of imaginative discipline I have been concerned to promote through the pupils' writing in the early years. The two most important of these points of contact are the training of imaginative concentration and the development of 'active awareness'; and the relationship of mime to the critical concept of *accuracy*, which I have emphasised in connection with their written work.

In the first place, I contended that in the training of the imagination we needed to establish a habit of imaginative concentration, and suggested that the best means of ensuring this was to prepare for writing by relaxing and letting the mind dwell on a topic for several minutes before writing anything. This approach, under a variety of teachers, has consistently led to a much closer visualisation and to the avoidance of facile word-spinning. As those who have tried free drama will know, facile and superficial acting – the easy, derivative stuff – is generally the result of plunging straight into the acting exercise without thought; the weakness of unprepared acting is thus closely analogous to that which afflicts unprepared imaginative composition. Both mime and imaginative writing require a period of physical stillness during which the subject is mentally explored, tentatively at first, but gradually with deeper and closer focus and with an increasing degree of emotional involvement. This kind of preparation seems to me the

foundation of any systematic attempt to train the imagination. It is here that the discipline of the subject primarily lies, for out of this everything proceeds. To ask a child to act, for example, a railway porter on a hot Friday afternoon, and to let him do it immediately, is actively to encourage mere 'hamming' or caricature. If he is to act, he must first feel, and his preparation must be sufficiently concentrated and sustained to ensure that he has explored the various sensations involved before he attempts to communicate them through the language of mime. The physical stillness of this initial phase is part of what Rose Bruford and others are stressing when they talk about *relaxation* – indeed what is first required is not that the children relax physically and think about the subject to be mimed, but that they relax physically *and* mentally – i.e. they begin by trying to empty their minds as well. Thus the teacher is ill advised to ignore the experts' stress on relaxation, for the deeper the initial physical and interior stillness that preceded the mime, the greater the ultimate potentialities of the exercise when it is carried out. It is worth noting also that regular practice in the right kind of relaxation is extremely helpful in ensuring a good classroom climate – if it is persisted in, the urge to fool around tends to die away among the most effervescent, since the exercises that follow the relaxation are themselves an enjoyable outlet for their natural energy.

The vividness, zest and absorption of their ultimate expression in mime are generally in direct proportion to the restraint and discipline of the initial phase. At first, the children find it very hard to relax – or even to keep still – and in this situation much of what I said in Chapter 1 is apposite: once again the teacher may tell much of what is going on in their minds as he watches them lying on the floor. There will at the outset be a good deal of twitching, self-conscious giggling and eye-catching, but this stage should not last for long, particularly when many of the early exercises are performed almost as a drill: where everyone is involved, self-consciousness is more easily overcome. The importance of questioning also deserves to be re-emphasised in this context. After the necessary initial relaxation has been attained (more or less¹), the teacher may announce the subject – for example, the seaside on a hot day – and then, by questioning, lead the children to smell, taste, hear, feel and see the whole scene as they lie motionless on the floor. Here the technique is exactly the same as that suggested for imaginative writing.

It should be hardly necessary to stress the possibilities here of ex-

¹ There is little point in being a perfectionist at the start, unless one has a very remarkable control over the class; relaxation is a difficult art and is only mastered with practice.

ploring the same subject in both writing and mime, nor the way this concentration helps both modes of expression. In fact, mime appeals to me because of this; it develops a mental and a physical control in the children, and it also enables us to explore the same areas of experience in the same sensual way. These areas are not primarily those of fiction or of fantasy – to which I shall refer later – but those of real experience: once again we are to rediscover the familiar. With the less able children, the use of mime in the preparation of a subject they are ultimately to write about nearly always brings a marked increase in fluency. For example, the first time I approached composition in this way – with a second-year class of secondary modern C-stream ability – they wrote, on average, four sides each, which was approximately double their usual amount. The increase in quantity was partly the result of an improvement in quality, closer visualisation having led them to discover just how much there was to say, but merely to achieve greater length is important with children whose normal fluency is limited. The following passage, written by a twelve-year-old girl, this time of average grammar school ability, may serve to illustrate the relationship between imaginative writing and mime. The passage testifies, not merely to the effects of the training described in Chapter 1, but also to the mime practice which she had received and which is reflected in the precision of detail.

I picked up a bright round orange, and endeavoured to peel it. I dug my thumb nail into its thick skin and the juice squirted out and pattered to the floor.

The last piece of peel to come off was a big peice and it fell from my hand to the carpet below. I pulled the skinless orange into equal quarters, and proceeded to devour them. The first bite was a little sour but the second was lucious. One by one the delisious peices of orange were eaten, the taste was that of all things delicious and exiting. I picked up the last quarter and fingered it for a moment, its thin, smooth, transperant skin was slightly sticky, and inside it, I could see many orange shapes containing juice. With a final glance at the last peice of orange I popped it in, and chewed hard for a few seconds before every morsal of it had gone, and I only had its protecting skin left dryly in my hands.

The second point of contact I suggested was the critical awareness that may be involved in both their writing – witness the passage above – and in mime. The criterion I posited for the assessment of their writing was *accuracy*, which we may define as the adequacy of words in conveying an experience; something of the same concept may be applied to mime if for ‘words’ in the rough definition above we substitute ‘expressive movement’. After the children have worked as a class on simple individual mime exercises, they may be asked to assess

each other's efforts – to estimate how adequately John conveyed the idea that it was a hot day, or Gill that she was fed up with housework. Gesture and movement can be vague, just as language can, and the children soon learn to recognise and praise acting which is accurate and careful – which proceeds from a proper interior recollectedness. Most teachers stress the need for critical appraisal by the children, for they learn much from watching as well as acting themselves; the context of mime is one in which it is easy to establish that criticism is more than a negative exercise – a theme to which I shall return in the second section of this book. Where there is superficiality, the device of making them repeat the exercise in slow motion generally results in immediate improvement. Indeed, by watching each other they come to recognise that the best efforts are nearly always those that take longest. Thus they learn how *much* there is to say in the language of gesture if everything is to be made clear – just as they learnt how much there was to say in words about even a simple experience, or the description of a single object.

The range of subject matter that lends itself to treatment in mime is far too vast to explore here and the teacher should base his work on schemes such as those set out in some of the books noted in the bibliography. As already suggested, however, much of the material in the first four chapters of this book lends itself very well to work in mime¹: in particular, the early work on narrative cries out to be related to some kind of dramatic expression, the two forms being mutually corrective – mime helps to bring out the inadequacies of a written narration, and vice versa. For this reason there is much to be said for basing some early work in narrative upon the writing of simple mime plays in which the children have the opportunity to assess the relative merits of both the mime and the writing – a critical exercise they much enjoy. The basic criteria are very simple – it is more or less a matter of deciding whether the writer put more into his narrative than the mimic into his mime. I have also said a good deal about early work on mood, and this is very easily related to drama, of which it represents one very important aspect. We need to give them practice in identification, not only with particular types of people, but with individuals of a particular age and character, on a particular day, in the grip of particular emotions. This elementary practice in expressing mood and emotion, singly and in

¹ It is worth noting, for instance, that Maisie Cobby suggests the following sequence when one is introducing character and emotion into mime – the children should work: (1) as themselves; (2) as themselves in a particular mood; (3) as another character; (4) as that character in the grip of some particular emotion or mood. The sequence is obviously similar to the kind of progression I have suggested for their imaginative writing.

groups, leads in turn to topics of the kind discussed in the third chapter, on empathy.

In the first two years' drama there will probably be an increasing tendency towards group work. Thus Maisie Cobby advocates the establishment, at an early stage, of 'family groups', in which the children retain specific rôles for a considerable period, experimenting with a variety of different situations. I have known this device work extremely well, and its special advantage is the way in which it focuses attention on down-to-earth situations drawn from their everyday experience. There are various types of situation which may involve the whole class,¹ however, and some work of this kind is desirable in order to maintain the social cohesion of the class unit.

Even when group work is developing well, the type of mime drill advocated for the earliest stages is still valuable. It may constitute a useful limbering-up exercise: even if each child merely begins the lesson by spending a few minutes eating an imaginary orange, for example, this enables us to make sure that detailed accuracy and precision of movement are not altogether lost in the flux and excitement of group work. Conversely, where the group work has become vague and flabby, there may be a case for a few corrective exercises of mime drill, perhaps using some of the actual actions involved in the group project we have had to criticise.

The point at which group improvisation is allowed to involve speech is a matter for the individual to decide. As suggested by Rose Bruford in the short extract I quoted earlier, many teachers tend to delay the introduction of speech for some time. In practice, it will probably be found that what is right for one class one year will be unsuitable with a comparable class the following year. The essential thing is to provide situations in which their capacity for imaginative concentration is developed until they urgently want to speak. Quite often their first efforts may result in mediocre speaking and also in a deterioration in the quality of their acting, but, provided the acting situations are real to them, they soon begin to improve – particularly when they are reminded of the kind of concentration that is required. In this context, also, the corrective value of occasional mime drill is considerable.

The peculiar and outstanding virtue of group improvisation lies in the opportunities it offers for the further exploration of human relationships and problems that may have been raised in other English work, or in subjects such as history and geography. Play-reading of the old

¹ For example, situations involving larger communities, where events in the life of a village, perhaps, or a factory, are re-created by the whole class. Again, various types of crowd-scene may be devised.

formal type is generally a self-contained exercise, isolated from the rest of the child's own experience; improvisation, on the other hand, may be related to almost any aspect of life, inside school or out of it. The content of the book, *Reflections*,¹ to which I shall refer in more detail in Chapter 9, may provide us with an example of this. The authors of this book set out to explore three areas of experience that are relevant and interesting to adolescents, the aim being to promote thought, discussion and writing about them. A term's work is devoted to the consideration of each:

1. Family, Community and Work
2. The Mass Media
3. Questions of our Time

Under these three broad headings are included such topics as 'Old Age', 'Paul brings Clara home', 'First Room of My Own'; 'Cough Remedies', 'Westerns'; 'The Pay Packet', 'The Arrest', 'Borstal Boy' and 'Hiroshima'. The whole list of contents is remarkable for its consistent relevance to the adolescent situation, and because of this is likely to promote the kinds of writing and discussion the authors were hoping for. This relevance has further implications, however: on looking through the contents I was struck by the number of topics which lend themselves to treatment in improvised dramatic situations. Where we are dealing with aspects of experience that really mean something to our pupils, there is everything to be said for using as many approaches as possible; such concentration is necessary if we are to develop any depth of insight.

Improvised drama may be related not only to the exploration of particular themes, however, but also to the development of specific skills. The opportunities to link dramatic activity and various kinds of writing practice are almost too obvious to mention, and the same is true of work with the tape-recorder. We may take as an example the theme of 'Old Age', mentioned above. A project on such a topic as this could run the whole gamut of work in English. Factual research and reportage would be involved in the discovery of material on such things as old-age pensions and National Assistance. Once the facts were clear, these would be treated in a variety of ways: objective, persuasive, emotive, either in speech or writing. After some of the implications and extent of the problem had become clear to the children it might be possible for selected pupils to undertake live interviews with old people known to them. I say 'selected' pupils, for this kind of exercise would

¹ By Simon Clements, John Dixon, and Leslie Stratta; published by Oxford University Press, 1963.

obviously have to be undertaken with tact and sympathy, but the advantages of studying a problem of this kind at first hand are real, and it might be possible to obtain the interviewees' consent to tape-recording of some of the conversations.¹ 'Live' material of this kind may, of course, be supplemented by literature dealing with the experience of old age. The range of this is clearly enormous but it should be our aim to find a variety of treatments, reflecting both involved and detached, both adult and childish² viewpoints. Once the subject has become real to the children, they may be ready to examine and experiment with it in more specifically dramatic terms – in the treatment of concrete family situations, or in the general, thematic mode of free drama or movement work, perhaps to a musical background. This sketchy outline may be sufficient to indicate something of the range of work possible on an important theme, and the relation of various aspects to dramatic expression.

I have referred already to the use of literature – not necessarily of a dramatic kind – in connection with improvised drama. It must be clear that many novels offer situations that lend themselves to dramatic treatment, but it is worth noting that this is essentially a two-way process, for the acting out of such situations may be expected to modify and deepen the actors' comprehension of the novel whence they were taken. Furthermore the children's receptivity to a particular play may sometimes be notably improved by dramatic improvisation on some of the situations, themes and characters it contains, before the play itself is read. It is possible also to act scenes that are not in the play, but which are taken for granted or referred to. Occasionally the understanding of the bias of the play may be helped by enacting a scene on the same lines as one actually in it, but concentrating upon the feelings of characters who achieve no such prominence in the original. Devices such as these are particularly helpful when working on plays where the language constitutes an initial barrier that is often never effectively overcome when the text is studied *in vacuo*.

Even in a survey as brief as this, it would be disingenuous to omit any reference to difficulties the teacher is likely to encounter. I have already mentioned problems of accommodation and timetable, and there is no doubt that though much good mime³ and speech work is possible in an

¹ A surprising number of children possess tape-recorders, which they would enjoy using in this way.

² For example, Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine* contains a remarkable description of a very old man as he appeared to some small boys who visited him, and to whom he was an object of awe.

³ See especially the exercises given in Rose Bruford's books on mime in the classroom.

ordinary classroom, a living dramatic tradition can hardly be a feature of a school which does not allow sufficient time and open space for the activity. For my purposes, however, the most significant difficulty is that caused by the onset of adolescent self-consciousness.

I have dealt with the basic characteristics of this stage in Chapter 2, where I drew a parallel between the inhibiting effect of self-consciousness on imaginative writing and on dramatic improvisation and mime. I suggested that from about the end of the second year it became necessary to place more emphasis on technique and that this provided the children with needed support, helping them to avoid self-consciousness. This can be a more acute problem in drama than in any other work in English – the sexes are becoming aware of each other in a way that makes them increasingly diffident about acting in front of a mixed audience. Generally the girls, with their earlier maturation, become inhibited before the boys; it is quite common to find them retiring from active participation in drama lessons from the end of the second year onwards, whereas the boys remain zestful and uninhibited for some time yet. This is no doubt one of the situations in which the co-educational system poses particularly difficult problems. In a single-sex situation there is much less difficulty, and where the teacher has the confidence of the pupils the problem may never really arise, though the character of their acting will undergo significant changes.

The particular advantage of technique at this stage is that, by emphasising the tricks of the trade, it distracts the attention from the human situation which may be embarrassing. For the same reason more play-reading and more play-writing may now be undertaken. Where the technical approach is adopted, there will need to be a good deal less free improvisation and more specific direction from the teacher.

Though I have always found this a difficult stage to deal with in co-educational situations, however, I am by no means sure how far we need accept that adolescence must inevitably so completely alter the work and attitude of the children. This feature of adolescent behaviour is probably more susceptible of modification through early training than is commonly realised. It is quite true, of course, that to attempt free dramatic work of any type with, for example, a third-year class who have had no previous experience of it is to invite almost certain failure. Where the first two years have been well spent, however, and where the teacher has the pupils' confidence, they may be prepared to go on acting. Once again, everything depends on the teacher.

On reflection, that last apparent platitude requires qualification.

Where poetry has become an accepted part of their experience and consciousness in the first two years of secondary school, I have never found much difficulty with poetry in the adolescent years, and the same is probably true where drama is concerned. This does not only depend on the teacher, however, but *on the attitude to the subject in the school as a whole*. And for the pupil, the attitude of authority to a subject is often interpreted, rather mechanically, according to the provision made for it in the timetable. If this provision is meagre enough to support the idea that drama is a mere 'frill' – an essentially childish activity, peripheral to the main serious business of schooling, only carried on by a minority of odd adolescents who are 'mad about acting' and are in all the school plays – if this is the situation, then the average child in the third and fourth years will reflect the apparent attitude of authority and will reject drama, just as many adolescents reject poetry – as 'sissy'.

There are a minority of schools, however, where this problem never seems to arise – simply because the support of the whole organisation is so evidently behind all forms of dramatic activity. The ability of such a positive bias to influence and modify adolescent attitudes that we may too readily accept as 'normal' can be remarkable. I know some secondary modern schools where the results of the drama work are to be seen in the tone of the schools as a whole; in almost every aspect of social relationships one sees greater freedom (I do not mean laxity), poise and confidence. The climate is one where the adolescents and staff may talk easily, where respect is a mutual thing, not a matter of heel-clicking. There are not, I fear, many schools like this, but there are some. And they demonstrate what can be achieved. To obtain such results, the attitude of authority, of the whole body of the staff, must be clear and unequivocal. Rose Bruford testifies to the influence of mime in schools where it is compulsory, and it must be stressed that, however undesirable it may seem to put the activity on such a footing, it is the single most effective way of convincing the children that the subject matters:

Where mime is a compulsory curriculum subject (and this is rare), it has remarkably fine results. The girls are well-poised and easy. At the usual self-conscious age of adolescence they are able to express themselves in a simple, happy, and forthcoming way, instead of becoming over-emotional and ingrown . . .¹

Even more striking testimony to the impact of drama in a school where it is established as something in which *everyone* takes part, and

¹ Rose Bruford, *Speech and Drama*, Methuen, pp. 5-6.

where a generous allocation of time is made (in this particular case, an hour per week), was given in a recent television programme.¹ In this, Miss Marjorie Sigley demonstrated the feasibility of continuing and developing work in movement and improvisation during adolescence, with *mixed classes*. Obviously, much of her success was due to her own ability, but the importance of the backing she received from the organisation would be hard to exaggerate.

The actual methods used by this teacher may be variously described: the terms 'free drama', 'dramatic movement', 'modern educational dance', 'music and movement', to mention some of the most common, reflect variations on the same basic approach which we must now consider in some detail.

Though this approach to drama has a corresponding art form – 'modern ballet' – there is generally less stress on artistic evaluation in the teaching of children on these lines than in most forms of dramatic work, including mime. The teacher's concentration is primarily upon the extension of awareness and the consequent development of individual personality: the ability to speak, move or act *well* is largely incidental. Yet just as a stress on the content of imaginative writing leads ultimately to an improvement in manner, style or technique, so does an emphasis on the dramatic exploration of relevant areas of personal and social experience lead indirectly to acting, movement, speech and dance which most of us would call good. In fact, many of the better childish productions in this genre challenge comparison with adult work in modern dance and modern ballet.

For a long time the teacher makes no attempt to evaluate, since this would be to concentrate critical attention upon a child's movement and expression in a way almost certain to inhibit the self-confidence that may be just now developing. It is only after several years' work that the children may be ready to consider their drama in a critical way, for it is not until their confidence and enjoyment of expressive work of this type is established and unassailable that we dare introduce critical criteria. In many cases, some of them may already have begun to assess their own efforts, and we may be able – with sympathy and tact – to help them in this, but we must be patient. Essentially, the process is not merely one of discovery, but of *self-discovery*, and as such it takes time. We may hope – ultimately – to be concerned with artistic form, but our first aim is liberation, which is basically a therapeutic process.

I have said some slighting things about a purely therapeutic conception of imaginative writing, partly because I believe that it is

¹ *The Bundle*, ABC Television, February 23rd, 1964.

needed by only a small minority. In the case of drama, however, the opposite is probably true; the therapeutic value of free movement work is immeasurably greater because it involves the whole personality in a way that writing cannot. Writing as a means of fantasy-expression is in any case confined by words, or by the lack of them: obviously many of those who have the greatest need of free expression in writing are precisely those whose level of intelligence is below average and who are emotionally disturbed – in other words, those who have the poorest verbal equipment to start with. Theoretically, in free drama everyone is equal, though of course some more so than others; but, at least, virtually all have the same basic physical equipment.

To begin with we must be quite clear about the relevance of this work, and about our aims and criteria. Great importance is commonly and rightly attached to physical education, but the drawback here is that though strength or other kinds of physical efficiency are developed, these for the most part have a limited relevance to daily living and make relatively little impact upon personality development. There is still something to be said for the 'team-spirit', and even the 'stiff upper-lip' of the public schools games tradition, I suppose, but such training only affects a small minority. It may be argued, however, that any movement therapy is irrelevant to all but the thoroughly neurotic and maladjusted. Any such contention needs to be rebutted at the outset. In English teaching we *are* concerned with personality development, and if this is so, we must note the simple fact that whereas many children are inhibited in their spoken or written expression, the vast majority are physically inhibited. Sports touch only the few, and most people one sees in the street have no inkling of the expressive capacity of the human body. Part of the influence of modern living is greatly to restrict us in our range of gesture and movement, and even the very clothes we wear are conducive to the same restriction.¹

If this physical aspect were an isolated factor, the case for therapy would be a limited one. In fact, however, the physical cannot be separated from the spiritual; by failing to develop physical expressive capacity, we are failing to develop another means of communication, another mode of insight. Furthermore the need for physical expression among young people is urgent. It was not for nothing that the boy at the bus stop on a wet day² vented his feelings of frustration by throwing a brick at the railing. This is a significant, a typical pattern. We must

¹ For example, shoes. Our awareness of our feet is normally limited to moments of discomfort. Thus it is worth emphasising that, wherever possible, this work should be carried out in bare feet – even gym shoes are inhibiting.

² In the extract quoted in Chapter I, p. 36.

be careful at this point to avoid the common failure to discriminate between physical expression and physical exercise: adolescents do not break windows or rip cinema seats in order to flex their muscles – they are expressing an interior state of sub-articulate feeling. To compel large boys and girls to spend all day sitting at tiny desks is merely to increase such tensions. As a result they will need exercise – exercise, however, where the physical activity is meaningful and exacting enough to be a means of release and self-expression. Much of the best youth work now going on has sprung from the recognition of this and from the realisation that adolescents require challenges that are conspicuously lacking in their ordinary life. Some, at least, of their rebellious attitudes to authority arise simply from the fact that conflict with authority provides such a stimulus of challenge and danger. At a non-delinquent level, there are huge numbers of children who go through the last year at school in a state of apathetic frustration – witness the number of bored adolescents to be seen, any evening, merely ‘hanging around’ a housing estate or town centre.

I have no evidence that might *prove* that the numbers of these unfortunates would have been reduced by provision at school or club for the kind of dramatic activity I describe. Nevertheless, of all the provisions of which modern schools are capable, this seems to me the single most hopeful approach for the future. Despite the excellence of Outward Bound Courses, Adventure Schools, or The Duke of Edinburgh’s Awards, the one way in which *all* children may be given an opportunity for the exciting and creative physical expression of feelings that in our adolescent society normally remain muddled and inarticulate is, it seems to me, in drama. To wait for conclusive evidence before making the necessary, whole-hearted provision is to ensure that the very core of the youth problem remains virtually untouched; and there is sufficient evidence already available to suggest that, whether or not free drama solves the problem, it may go some way towards mitigating it.

The problem is obviously most acute amongst non-academic children, not merely because they are ‘dim’, but because school work generally offers to them fewer satisfactions than to the able. I would agree that those adolescents whose activity in school is thoroughly purposeful and motivated in an academic way are less in need of drama therapy, but this is only relative: their personalities, adequate now, may be made yet richer if they are not denied the experience of drama merely because ‘they are getting on quite nicely as they are’.

From this it follows that training in such work should be a *normal*

part of the education of teachers of English. This need probably be no more than an hour per week for a year, provided it is well done and provided its importance is properly emphasised by those in control. Its justification lies not only in the development of an additional teaching skill, but also in the impact it makes on the teacher's personality. Such vigorous and enjoyable recreation is sorely needed in view of the too academic bias of much teacher-training, which generally ensures that the teacher is adequately equipped in technical, but not necessarily in personal, terms. Many teachers in fact go through life bringing only a part of their personality into the classroom; lack of confidence and individual inhibitions result in a variety of defensive and authoritarian façades which are crippling handicaps under which to labour for thirty or forty years. The need for a child-centred education is now, paradoxically, preached by many lecturers who seem strangely blind to the fact that the same principle might be valid in the education of students.

It may be suggested that attitudes and personality are pretty well determined by the time one has reached the age of twenty. Though true, this does not mean that some modification is impossible. I have seen the impact upon young teachers – and some not so young – of attendance at various evening and part-time courses in free dramatic activity, and I have also observed the increased confidence and flexibility in the classroom that have resulted from this broadening and invigorating experience.

It may seem high time something more explicit was said about method in this kind of drama work. Once again, however, I must emphasise that what I can say will be personal, derivative and incomplete. The real answer is to consult the sources, particularly Rudolf Laban and some of his followers – or, better still, to attend a short course and to experience the thing for oneself.

One most obvious feature of the work – whatever name we give it – is the extensive use of music (together, sometimes, with percussion used to create rhythmic effects). The music is often classical, and usually of a strongly evocative, atmospheric or rhythmic character, but a good deal of jazz is also suitable, having the same qualities and often being more accessible to the children. It is hardly necessary to point out that working to a background of music – let alone responding to it in movement – is something which the children's normal experience leads them to accept fairly readily. There are obviously an infinite number of ways in which the music may be used, but two rather different approaches may be noted here. In the first, the music is purely a background, generally chosen for its suitability to the theme on which the children

are working, but in no way determining the shape or texture of their activity. Alternatively, the evocative quality of the music may be used to suggest both theme and treatment; there may be some attempt at crude choreography, or at least some synchronisation of sound and movement. In early work of this kind a small collection of percussion instruments are invaluable, for young children enjoy vigorously rhythmic movement in a dramatic context. Dervish dances, for example, are very popular, particularly exercises such as the following. They are asked to listen to a rhythmic drumbeat – TUM, ti-ti TUM, ti-ti TUM, ti-ti TUM – and are urged to try to *feel* the rhythm. Then they are grouped in circles, with about six to ten children in each group, and are asked to kneel in a crouching position, whereupon the drumbeat begins again, at first very softly but gradually increasing in tempo and volume. Initially they are supposed to respond only with movements of fingers and hands upon the floor, but the aim is for the rhythmic response gradually to involve more and more of their bodies. Ultimately they will rise and perform the dance moving round in a circle. Practice in this kind of exercise soon loosens them up and they show an astonishing flexibility. Subsequently they will enjoy beating out and working to rhythms of their own invention.

Whether the music is used to dictate the movement or merely as an atmospheric background, its effect over a period is evident in the increasing freedom and confidence of their movements. Curiously, in whatever way it is used it seems to remove much of the initial embarrassment. The same is true in work with adolescents and with adults, but where these are being introduced to such activity for the first time, there is much to be said for the use of a darkened hall, in which their identity is comfortingly obscured and where even the most diffident quite soon seem prepared to gambol and gyrate in a way that would be inconceivable to them in the full light of day. The use of masks may also be noted as a device which helps to achieve the same effect.

As in the mime,¹ much of the work in the first two years is individual. The casual visitor to drama lessons of this type with first-year children will see not a group but a number of separate individuals, doing sundry and often very clumsy actions, with varying degrees of absorption, to a background of music. He will look for the teacher and may not find him at first; then he will see him, tucked away unobtrusively and apparently so intent on checking a pile of gramophone records that he

¹ Though – for purposes of emphasis – I have separated the two approaches, they run into each other easily enough, and there is everything to be said for using both – if time allows.

is unaware of his class. In fact, however, the experienced teacher does not need to watch them all the time, for their personalities and their individual difficulties are extraordinarily easy to see in this work. Some, for example, may take no part at all for several weeks. At one special school¹ which I visited recently, I observed a movement lesson in which most of the nine-year-old children were taking part, though often with pitiful hesitancy; one boy, however, spent the whole period circling the room, touching the wall, the doors, the window with his hands as he passed – just as terrified at the thought of launching himself into the open space as if it had been a cauldron of boiling oil. Fortunately, such a pronounced agoraphobia is a rare phenomenon, but the example may serve to emphasise the need for patience and the futility of looking for quick results.

Most children are to a greater or less extent agoraphobic, however, and our first consideration must be to provide situations in which they are encouraged to shed their timidity through the exploration of space and the discovery of the expressive potential of their own bodies. How many of us, for example, have ever explored the area of space behind the neck, or the small of the back, or have felt the kinaesthetic sensations attendant upon such movement? It may be cynically answered that there is little point in attempting anything so manifestly useless, but in fact the discovery of his body's possibilities may be an intensely exciting process – to a child particularly, but also to an adult whose limbs bend more reluctantly. It is very hard to describe the kind of confidence produced by this new physical self-awareness – I can only urge the teacher to try it for himself. For children its results, paradoxically, may sometimes be seen in much freer oral expression, whether in a specifically dramatic context or not.

I have argued that there is a place in mime for drill, and there is a very exacting drill routine carried out in professional training along Laban lines. This is based on an analytical study of the various movements involved in daily life, from which Laban deduced a series of archetypal movements. These have their own character, direction and force, and the professional will practise using them to explore systematically the various spatial zones around, above, beneath, in front of, behind, and to each side of his body. Subsequently these may be practised in series of related or contrasting movements, in which physically exacting routine there is now an increasing creative, or artistic element. Whether or not the teacher uses such drill with the children is a matter of individual choice, but it is immensely valuable

¹ For the 'educationally subnormal'.

for him to know something about it. For my own part, I believe that the technical, unembarrassing nature of some of the exercises offers an opportunity to equip the children with a wider expressive vocabulary, and has particular advantages when dealing with boys. There is perhaps a danger of the lesson becoming something too close to physical education but this is not necessarily a bad thing – indeed, I would like to see more physical education itself conducted on these lines, as is done by at least one large authority. Here is another opportunity for co-operation between the staff teaching different subjects.

The extent to which the teacher takes an active part must depend, once again, on the kind of person he is. There is no doubt that his example can stimulate, but it can also inhibit: it may be valuable, however, in breaking down initial resistance and the teacher may be well advised to demonstrate at the outset just sufficiently to show clearly that he is not afraid of making a fool of himself¹ and to suggest by implication, therefore, that the subject is not 'sissy'. After this he should probably retire into the background as much as possible, perhaps for the first two years, and concentrate on providing suitable stimuli when needed. In work with adolescents, his example may be more necessary, and if he has a good relationship with the group he may be able actually to work with them for much of the time.

In these third and fourth years much more stress will probably be laid on group-work, though this may have begun to develop earlier. The material here will be much the same as that used in straightforward improvisation. Whether the work involves speech or not is up to the individual to decide – some teachers tend occasionally to remove the musical background at this stage in order to promote speech, while others base speech work on themes that have previously been worked over in movement. Having become aware of themselves and their feelings in this new way, the children tend to co-operate more readily, but this co-operation can only arise when sufficient confidence has been built up – confidence, one symptom of which is often a desire to express thought and feeling in word as well as action. The exploration of social themes and situations in free drama may be related to much other work in English, with the emphasis partly on experimentation with personal relationships. These often constitute a particularly acute problem during the years of adolescence, and drama offers unique opportunities for 'playing out' tensions that we are ill advised to neg-

¹ The effectiveness of this expedient was conclusively proved by the marked increase in attendance at the school drama club following an attempt to demonstrate a relaxed, painless stage-fall which resulted in my being led ignominiously away to hospital to have several stitches in my chin.

lect but which we can rarely tackle explicitly. Free drama of this type will probably be the most 'naturalistic' they undertake.

Side by side with their social development goes a corresponding increase in emotional complexity. For this reason, though there is now more realistic group work, and more genuine co-operation both critical and creative, there is also a need for them to express private, interior emotions in individual work rather similar to that undertaken in the earliest years. The period of adolescence is commonly marked by an increase in day-dreaming in which, as Professor Valentine puts it, 'the youth finds some satisfaction in imagining instead of actually pursuing the ends'.¹ He goes on to say that 'A certain amount of such day-dreaming may be regarded as healthy and normal in the adolescent.' This seems clearly to suggest that we are justified in allowing the private experience a place in dramatic work at this stage, especially as this is leading to one type of creative expression. The dangers of total withdrawal have been widely emphasised by psychologists in recent years, however, and we need to remember that - 'when day-dreams become a substitute for action and for adjustment to reality they suggest either constitutional mental weakness or the giving up of the struggle for satisfaction and mental peace by adaptation to (or of) the environment.'² We will not encourage any such unhealthy tendency as long as we ensure that more realistic group work on social themes runs parallel with the drama intended to provide an outlet for individual emotional experience. Most teachers I have seen normally allow only relatively short periods for individual movement at this stage - often by way of relaxation before or after group work and prefaced by some such casual remark as - 'Anyone feel like working to this record?' Some may just sit and listen but by providing - over a period - a variety of such stimuli, and by the lack of any compulsion, the teacher makes sure that regular opportunities arise for the expression of various moods - tranquil, brooding, excited or violent. In this work, the music is a background which helps them to seize and realise potentialities within themselves, and to come to terms with their joys, fears and ambitions through acting them out. Here is a release for many urges and drives that may otherwise find much more undesirable expression.

Some of these moods and conflicts may, however, find release in group work. The material here is not that of realistic social situations and personal relationships but of more abstract and elemental themes: one grapples now less with the presentation of one old person, for

¹ C. W. Valentine, *Psychology and its bearing on Education*, Methuen, p. 557.

² *Ibid.*

example, than with old age itself, and consequently with pain, weariness and death also. In this activity their range of emotional expression and their depth of insight may be systematically extended. Myth and legend are valuable sources for work of this kind, lending themselves easily to symbolic presentation.

Again, to the cynical onlooker, material such as this may appear oddly out of tune with 'modern youth' as he conceives it, but in fact it offers wide scope for the exploration of matters that deeply concern many young people. In some cases, one might even say that their personal involvement seems to be in direct proportion to the apparent abstraction or irrelevance of the theme on which they are working. The Orpheus and Eurydice legend, for example, may seem little more than a fairy story. Yet into the framework it provides may go all their own experience of loss, disillusionment, renewed hope, temptation; and their treatment of the theme may subtly reflect their growing sexual awareness, their striving for the unattainable and their developing religious sense.

It is true that much legendary and mythological material, with its obvious relation to the fairy story, is suitable for work with much younger children, but its usefulness is by no means confined to this stage. The young child's vision is single and open-eyed, and he readily accepts both magic and reality as coexisting aspects of his own experience. Stories of legendary adventure satisfy him because of their essential simplicity and because of their 'bigness'. The same features make an impact on the adolescent mind, but in a different way. Once again, they satisfy instinctive or even biological needs; but this time the material, instead of being merely accepted, is used, subtly transmuted, to provide a channel for the individual experience. Simply because the world of myth and legend is crowded with figures larger than life, and lacks particular modern – and hence inhibiting – associations, it encourages the adolescent in his projection of various emotions and ideals and ministers to his yearnings, unconscious though these may often be, towards the heroic, the good and the beautiful. Thus, precisely because the mythological concept of 'the Gods' is specifically unmodern, it offers a frame within which the adolescent may express individual feelings and attitudes of an unformalised religious kind – intimations of immortality which are a feature of adolescence, particularly among girls.

If I have laid considerable stress on two special aspects of drama, in neither of which I am in any sense an expert, it is primarily because I have had the opportunity of observing just what may be achieved in

these fields; and because I feel that the adoption of such methods on a much wider scale than hitherto is vital if we are in any sense to justify our ambition to educate the 'whole man'. Moreover, the areas of experience that some teachers are seeking to explore in these ways are intimately related to those which I have emphasised in the earlier chapters. And for the education of the emotions and the imagination to be in any way effective it must be carried out over a broad front. In a sense, therefore, the teacher who adopts my approach will not be he who follows my own peculiar eclectic method, but he who aims at the same ends and who seeks to relate, in his own way, the various topics I have dealt with to their possible applications in drama.

Part Two

The Critical Faculty

5 – English Re-integrated

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,
We shall have what to do after firing. But today,
Today we have naming of parts. Japonica
Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring gardens,
And today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel,

Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,
Which in our case we have not got. . . .

Henry Reed, 'Naming of Parts' from *The Map of Verona*, Jonathan Cape

What Reed wrote sounds a warning to the teacher as well as the sergeant-major – this is what instruction can become. The futility and irrelevance of arms drill evoked here present the teacher with an allegory not only striking but remarkably complete: 'today . . . yesterday . . . tomorrow' – the dreary repetition of an inevitable cycle; outside the classroom is the *real* world and hence the frustration of the inescapable drill – whether it be on a piling swivel or a point of grammar; and lastly there is the pathetic, implicit plea to take it all 'on faith' – 'whose use you will see . . . which in your case you have not got . . .'.

Here, then, is all the monotony, frustration, irrelevance and futility of the last lesson on a Friday afternoon. When I read the poem now I get a picture, not of depressed recruits, but of the child to whom formal grammar or poetry is a closed book, who sits hopelessly at his desk, every now and then snatching a glance through the window at the things that really exist, the things that matter.

If this picture were only true of bad teaching with tired children at unsuitable times, it would nevertheless be disturbing. Its significance is greater than this, however. It underlines the root cause of bad English teaching – the belief that this is a subject that can adequately be taught

by drill and instruction, by the methods that throw motivation and relevance out of the window and concentrate on mechanical competence. Again, while the analogy most obviously suggested by the poem is with the teaching of grammar – ‘naming of parts’ – its relevance to a wide range of critical and analytical exercises is scarcely less striking.

The basic weakness of most textbooks is precisely that they assume that drill produces results; if it does not, then the answer is to provide more drill in the next chapter or volume. There is little possibility of relevance and motivation; what competence is acquired lies in the mere manipulation of dead language. Furthermore, such drill involves fragmentation, with a once vital language subdivided for vocabulary drill, grammatical drill, punctuation drill, and so on. The reader who retains anything of the argument of the introduction to this book will readily realise that here once again we are up against the false dichotomy between the interests of the subject and those of the child. The increasing range of public examinations and the consequent increase in the number and range of textbooks make it more than ever necessary for the teacher to see that the interests of child and subject are complementary.

We have earlier noted that, while most agree that the imaginative faculty is of signal importance, there is less agreement as to what the term really means, or how such a faculty is to be most profitably trained and exercised. The critical faculty – in the context of school work, at any rate – has perhaps attracted less attention, but the assumptions commonly made about it also are interestingly varied. Several of these may be suggested by the following definitions of the word ‘critical’ in the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*:

Definition 1: Given to judging; esp. fault-finding, censorious. . . .

It will be obvious that this is inadequate for our purposes, and that a wider definition is required, but two points must be made about it:

(a) This is the most widespread interpretation of the word and because of this the assumption that criticism is something negative or destructive is very hard to root out.

(b) More significant still is the fact that the child normally comes to us with this concept of criticism firmly fixed in his mind. We find this in his first suggestions when we ask him to criticise his own or other children’s work – ‘Too many full stops, or not enough; too many *ands*’, etc. For him, our demand means that he is expected to ‘pick flies’, to find fault. The idea of criticism as anything positive, involving the finding and commenting on what is *good*, is new to him.

Definition 2: Involving or exercising careful judgment or observation; nice, exact, punctual. . . .

This is clearly nearer what we want – at first sight it may even seem adequate. On closer inspection, however, this stress on ‘niceness’, on exactness of judgment, may be seen as potentially dangerous: many who are too enlightened to fall into the error of accepting the first definition nevertheless tend to assume that criticism is primarily a matter of analysis, ignoring the partnership that may exist between criticism and creation.

The danger of such an assumption – I am speaking now specifically of the classroom context – is suggested by Wordsworth’s well-known lines:

Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:
We murder to dissect . . .

Whether or not we are impressed by this thought in its original context, and though we might perhaps wish to qualify so sweeping a denigration of the rôle of the intellect, the thought is a particularly telling one when applied to English in the classroom. It does not reveal the whole truth, of course, but like Reed’s poem it offers a warning that the teacher can ill-afford to ignore. Much of the analysis, of the dissection of prose and poetry that cloaks itself under the guise of ‘comprehension’ is in a real sense ‘murder’: the child’s faculties are so engaged in discovering the parts that the whole poem is quite dead for him by the time his labours are completed.

Thus, though the second definition has the emphasis on careful judgment to recommend it, careful judgment being an advance on mere fault-finding, something more positive still is needed. What?

In the introduction to his *Practical Criticism*, James Reeves endorses C. Day Lewis’ dictum that ‘Appetite must precede discrimination,’ for, as Reeves says, ‘you must enjoy something before you begin to think why you enjoy it. . . .’ This, in fact, is the core of what I have to say about the critical faculty as it applies to children in the first four years of the secondary school. Aesthetic or critical discrimination I take to be predominantly – though not exclusively – the province of the fifth and sixth formers. Where there are very able younger children amongst our pupils, discrimination will have a place, but for the majority our main aim must be to fulfil the primary condition – *to foster enjoyment and develop appetite*.

I mentioned earlier the partnership of creation and criticism, and

one aspect of this is underlined by T. S. Eliot in his strictures on Matthew Arnold:

Matthew Arnold distinguishes far too bluntly, it seems to me, between the two activities: he overlooks the capital importance of criticism in the work of creation itself. Probably, indeed, the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this frightful toil is as much critical as creative.¹

As we shall see later, this aspect of the relationship between creation and criticism is important for our purposes, but more significant still is I. A. Richards' comment on some lines from Donne's 'Anatomy of the World':

In the Donne, I suggest, there is a prodigious activity between the words as we read them. Following, exploring, realizing, *becoming* that activity is, I suggest, the essential thing in reading the poem. Understanding it is not a preparation for reading the poem. It is itself the poem. And it is a constructive, hazardous, free creative process, a process through which a new being is growing in the mind.²

Both these quotations, it seems to me, serve to underline what has already been said about fragmentation. Thus, though for convenience of emphasis I have chosen to deal with the imaginative and critical faculties in separate sections,³ there will be – and rightly so – constant overlapping. The point to which I want to give special stress in this section is simply that the response to the written word should in the first case be a *positive* thing; the children respond actively through their creative imagination. In many cases bad or superficial reading stems from the child's having been allowed to think of comprehension in terms of a purely passive response, as if the words made an impact on the mind in the same way as light affects sensitive photographic film.



If 'appetite must precede discrimination', we need to begin by taking a closer look at it. Many children come from homes where the cooking is profoundly unimaginative, where the menu follows an inflexible and limited pattern, where Friday, for example, is synonymous with fish and chips. With our greater gastronomic enlightenment, we may feel that this is a sad state of affairs and we may be justified in this. The

¹ *Selected Essays*, Faber, p. 30. Some of the more detailed implications of this will be dealt with in the chapter on Critical Discipline.

² From 'The Interaction of Words' in *The Language of Poetry*, edited by Allen Tate; quoted by L. C. Knights in the preface to his *Explorations*.

³ I am aware that a similar line of defence is available to those who split up the subject in their teaching; there is, however, a valid distinction between those who do this in order to emphasise something which at that moment needs it, and those who having begun thus end up assuming that the parts of the whole are entities in themselves.

danger lies in the means we propose to employ to improve matters. There is absolutely no point in our attempting to effect an improvement by waving a dish of 'Langouste à la crème' under the offended nostrils of our pupils. Anything exotic or strange is likely to provoke a defensive or even a hostile reaction, and this is natural. We must therefore begin with the fish and chips and, having thus gained their confidence, work from there.

This underlying principle of working from the familiar towards the unfamiliar applies most obviously in our attitude to the children's reading – as we shall see in Chapter 8 – but it needs also to be applied to much of our work on specific language techniques. We are not trying to impose a more discriminating palate so much as to widen the range of possible enjoyment.

In work aimed at developing linguistic skills, this extension of enjoyment is often to be achieved by imitation. Instead of asking – or, worse still, telling – children to admire something, we shall be asking them to attempt to use the same technique themselves. By doing so, we ensure that their response is an active one, though obviously we need to select carefully the particular skill we want them to copy, for it must take into account their age and intelligence.

Imitation is something that is particularly appropriate to children of eleven and twelve, and is a challenge that they enjoy trying to meet. At this age they are often still collectors – of stamps, match boxes, train numbers and a host of unlikely things besides – and we are now attempting to make them collect skills in the same way.

By itself, however, such imitation is probably not enough. After all, the use of 'models' is common in many of the worst textbooks; the ablest children often respond very well to almost any work of this kind just as they will apply themselves earnestly to working through the other scrappy and rather pointless exercises that their textbook may contain. All this merely reflects their characteristic attitude at this stage of their lives: it is a testimony to their own amiable enthusiasm rather than to any intrinsic merit in the work they are doing.

The answer to this problem, it seems to me, is simply to ensure that the imitation is motivated – that the exercises are given a context. This is one of the most important points of contact between work on skills and the creative work we dealt with in the first section. Some examples may make this clearer. If we wished to concentrate for a lesson upon the use of the full stop, we might set a piece of continuous writing of the kind that demands more than the usual number of short sentences, something where the writer needs a rather jerky rhythm – for example,

a piece of atmospheric writing that conveys an impression of tension –

Ahead of him, the path to the house showed vaguely in the pale moonlight. He moved forward cautiously. Close by a twig snapped. He froze, listening intently. All was silent . . .

In a similar way, practice in the use of the question mark might be given by writing a series of the questions that so often mark the end of an episode in a serial story, questions designed to ensure that you 'listen next week'.

Most of us would be critical of a course in woodwork in which the first few months were entirely given over to the examination of the tools to be used, or to admiring the skill with which the teacher, or some other adult, used them. And yet this is what happens all too often – not only in the teaching of academic children, but also – such is the pernicious influence of bad textbooks – with the less gifted pupils, though admittedly in a less extreme form.

The great virtue of imitation is that the children are using the tools. This exercise can generally be made enjoyable in itself, and where a proper relationship with their other creative work is established, the imitation may also serve to promote the climate of heightened awareness to which I attached so much importance in earlier chapters. In the earlier context I was speaking of the enjoyable exploration of experience, and in the work we are dealing with now they are also extending their experience, though in a different way.

The provision of a context for the exercise of particular linguistic skills not only ensures that they are regarded as means to an end, rather than an end in themselves, but also that there is a real possibility of 'carry-over'. The great defect of, for instance, learning spelling lists lies in the fact that though many children enjoy the exercise, their spelling in their ordinary written work rarely reflects their performance in spelling tests. The same criticism may be made of many types of mechanical exercises.

The aim of this second section is to relate at least some of the most emphasised skills to each other and also to the whole business of communicating ideas. In the next chapter I shall consider three such aspects¹:

1. Grammar
2. Figurative language
3. Sound and rhythm in language: the development of the 'inner ear'

¹ Two of these are commonly stressed in the teaching of academic children but the third tends to be seriously neglected. All three are appropriate to the first two or three years of secondary school and lend themselves to the enthusiastic imitation and experiment that is so necessary at this stage.

6 – Whetting the Appetite - I

Grammar

It is a curious and interesting paradox that grammar teaching – now often rejected on the grounds of its irrelevance to the real business of *child-centred* education – was once thought of as an indispensable aid to the training not only of intellect but also of character. The belief in grammatical analysis as conducive to an increased mental clarity was obviously closely related to the belief in the efficacy of a full, ‘classical’ education, but mental clarity was not the sole aim. Mental clarity was, in fact, only one aspect of a particular view of character training which assumed the value of formal grammar to be proportional to its intrinsic difficulty. In this school, anything suggestive of ‘softness’ was decried, and the idea of education as tough, austere and exacting was exalted.¹

The full ‘classical’ case for grammar is now rarely stated. There is a widespread and well-founded scepticism about the ‘transfer-value’ of this kind of mental training. Above all, the old grammar tends to be rejected because of its intimate association with an authoritarianism that is felt to be one of the essential features of an outmoded, subject-centred, approach. Widespread though this kind of reaction may be, however, the attitudes of many teachers to grammar are interestingly ambivalent. At the root of this ambivalence – and existing parallel with a conscious ‘enlightened’ rejection of formal grammar work – is the subconscious, almost superstitious, guilt complex that is part of our inheritance from a more austere and puritanical age.² Thus it is that teachers may occasionally become anxious lest they should be, in some way, ‘making things too easy’ or too enjoyable for their pupils.

It seems to me that some such underlying guilt-feeling must also be posited in order to account for the unexplained retention of the

¹ The ideological climate of which this is one facet is best appreciated by reading not social history, but literature – for example, E. Gosse’s *Father and Son* and S. Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*.

² The works of Edmund Holmes and (more recently) Erich Fromm, which are cited in the Bibliography, are particularly relevant in this connection.

grammar sections that remain a common feature of course books. Since there is rarely any attempt to justify the presence of this material,¹ let alone indicate some connection with the rest of the work – even where this is entertaining and enlightened – one is left to assume that some grammar has been inserted in order to ‘toughen it up a little’. This lack of real conviction is revealed in the inclusion of much that is either inaccurate or misleading; in rather the same way, those teachers who teach grammar merely because it is ‘in the syllabus’ generally do so in a way that makes hideous mockery of the original classical claims about training in ‘mental clarity’.

Grammar also dies hard in public examinations. Admittedly most examination boards, if they include a question on grammar at all, make this optional. Here again the retention of such questions appears to have outlived educational conviction. To take one example: it was only a few years ago that the Union of Educational Institutions decided to drop the meaningless grammar exercises from its Secondary Certificate English paper – these, incidentally, had been originally devised as a result of the popular ‘watering-down process’.²

In order to justify itself as part of the English programme, however, grammar must be more than a sop to some vestigial puritan conscience. As I hoped to suggest by the quotation from *Naming of Parts* at the beginning of Part Two, and by the comparison with a woodwork course, we need to show that grammar can be functional and can bear upon the rest of the work, the aim being not to give names to things but to teach and encourage their use. Without attempting to cover anything like the whole field, I would argue that it is possible to teach grammar to able children in a way that is purposefully related to their skills in written and even in oral communication. I would contend, furthermore, that where the subject matter is too abstruse, or the ability of the children too limited, for the teacher to establish such a meaningful relation, he would be better advised to turn his attention elsewhere.³

¹ On the contrary, the introductions often contain full explanations of how and why most people may ‘feel free’ to ignore the grammar sections. Thus the common claim to ‘flexibility of use over a wide ability-range’ is supported by the assertion that with less able children various sections may be omitted – grammar especially.

² Two features of this should be noted: (a) the retention of sufficient material of an exacting type for the examination, or textbook, to appear ‘intellectually respectable’; and (b) a ‘realistic’ concession to the lower ability-ranges, not by a change in form or conception, but by a simple reduction in the dose administered.

³ ‘Grammar teaching can only be of benefit when it reinforces and organises the child’s own linguistic development.’ – ‘What I am suggesting is that we should help them to use the tools now lying idle in their hands.’ Pamela Gradon, ‘The Teaching of Grammar’, in *The Teaching of English in Schools*, a Symposium edited for the English Association by V. de Sola Pinto, Macmillan, 1946.

With children of a fairly wide range of ability, certain grammatical concepts seem to me of practical value. Thus some exploration of, and experiment with, verbs can have a positively helpful effect upon their writing technique. Instead of picking out, or breaking down, verbs in other people's sentences, however, we seek to study the impact of well-chosen verbs on the quality of a description or narrative.¹ Such exploration cannot go far without involving the complementary concept of adverbial function, for the children in their own writing will be faced with, and need to be made conscious of, the choice between a vigorous verb standing alone and a less effective one supported by a more or less vigorous adverb.² If we are stressing accurate description and narrative during the early years in secondary school there is a need for a vocabulary which will enable us to refer economically to significant points of technique. As I suggest later, the acquisition of technical jargon is itself an enjoyable 'collecting' exercise with able children, and those of average ability are surprisingly capable of assimilating such terms provided their experience of them is based not upon unreal analysis but on actual use in a meaningful context.

One of the most effective ways of concentrating attention upon verbs – i.e. actions – is by the use of mimed preparation before writing. A brief mime by the teacher will suffice to show, for example, that when one 'opens' a door this may in fact involve a pulling, or a pushing, or a wrenching, or a snatching, or a heaving motion – to mention just a few possibilities. In discussion the class will readily perceive that even when the word 'open' is supported by an adverb such as 'sharply' the action is less accurately and vigorously suggested than by a single word such as 'tug' – they may even be sophisticated enough to perceive how unsatisfactory it is to have *two* words describing one sharp, short action. Conversely they may see that adverbs might be very effective if one wished to give a sense of a prolonged or sustained movement. The two passages which follow were written by first-year boys of approximately secondary modern A-stream ability. The subject was set after a lengthy preparation in which about half the class mimed the actions of a coalman. The lesson was one of a series in which stress was laid upon accurate description of actions, but the fuller than usual mime preparation resulted in vigorous writing from most of the class, so that these two examples, though the best, were not untypical.

¹ I am thinking of verbs falling within the hackneyed definition of 'action words', of course, and ignoring the delectable subtleties of incomplete predication.

² Once again one sees the irrationality of dividing the subject into separate compartments, the choice of the really vigorous verb so often taking us out of the grammar- into the figurative-language-compartment.

The coalman gradually eases his body up against the coal lorry and clenches his hands tightly on the coal sac and then with all his strength he leavers the heavy sac onto his back and slowly limps away to the customer's coal place. Eventually he reaches it and he lays the sac upright in the coal place then he turns round and with a mighty heave he tips all the coal out and then goes back for another load.

COALMAN

He braces himself against the side of his blackned lorry. He selects the bag he wants and leans slightly forward, his hands groping for the ends of the sack. He then steadys himself for the strain, falters a little then heaves it onto the leather protector piece on his back. He then puffs out his cheeks and starts walking up the path. His steps are short and slow similar to the death march. And then heaves the sack off his back and pours the coal into the aready black coated coal bunker.

These two extracts provide interesting evidence of the way in which an occasional stress upon one technical facet of language may serve to reinforce our effort to encourage accurate, vigorous writing. Most of the grammar taught should arise from the discussion in class of the merits of passages such as those quoted.¹ For example, instead of considering separate aspects of verbs – such as tense and agreement – in the abstract, the children should be weighing the use of appropriate verbs in particular contexts. The critical sense, developed by such exercises, will enable them to assess the effectiveness of each verb by reference to the adequacy with which it conveys the essential features of a movement, such as speed and weight.

Consideration of such things as tense and agreement rarely form a subject of good class-teaching, but are better deferred until a suitable opportunity occurs for individual guidance for the minority who need it. Meanwhile one is placing the main emphasis where it surely ought to be put – on the adequate communication of the children's own ideas. The provision of a motivating, practical context for the consideration of a point of grammar, quite apart from making the lesson more interesting – or, rather, because of this – has a marked impact upon the receptivity of the children, especially the less able; after some exercises of the kind suggested, verbs *mean* something.

It is normal to divide and grade grammatical exercises according to their supposed difficulty but this procedure has very serious drawbacks, despite its specious rationality. Practically speaking, it ensures that there is no correspondence between grammar and the rest of the work in English. I doubt even whether there is any foundation for the common assumption that most children will be incapable of understanding

¹ The whole question of class evaluation is dealt with later on – see Chapter 10.

clauses until their third year. It may be true that it is harder to understand a particular type of adverbial clause than a simple adverb, but this is partly the result of dealing with them in separate series of mechanical exercises. The fact remains that one is often deferring consideration of tools which the children may have been wielding quite successfully for several years. (If they are still writing simple sentences in their third year something ought to have been done about it.) I would argue, however, that their ability to assimilate grammatical concepts is so much increased by the provision of suitable contextual motivation that eleven-year-olds can often understand a good deal more than an elementary first-year syllabus generally contains. By this I mean that their understanding is often complete enough for them to use grammatical structures reasonably effectively long before they are capable of analysing such constructions with any efficiency.¹ Since such efficiency has no bearing upon their self-expressive capacity, I cannot in any case consider it a significant educational objective.

As long as we are not concentrating upon mere analytical expertise, there seems no reason why we should not teach the basic ideas of adjectival and adverbial function, instead of limiting ourselves to simple adjectives and adverbs. Why cannot the single word, phrase and clause be treated much as, in woodwork, one might deal with the use of three different kinds of hammer or chisel? I have already suggested that the description of actions in a narrative sequence may profitably lead to some critical comparison of a single verb with an alternative expression in which a less precise verb is reinforced by a suitable adverb. There is no reason to stop there, however. If we are to describe an action accurately, we often need to include supplementary information which may make clear to the reader how, why, where and when the action was performed: thus our original pursuit of accuracy – of an adequate correspondence between the idea and the word describing it – leads us naturally to the discussion and use of phrases and clauses.

Just how far down the ability-scale one may usefully employ an approach of this kind must depend largely upon the individual teacher, his sense of priorities, and the extent to which he is able to relate particular points of grammar to the business of communication. With many children – probably with most – the explanation of grammatical functions may initially involve so alien an element of abstraction that considerable time and ingenuity will be needed to provide situations in

¹ For a characteristically forthright statement of this argument, see George Sampson, *English for the English*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 82–3.

which the techniques may be learnt and applied. Under such circumstances the teacher, with a host of more urgent matters demanding his attention, may justifiably conclude that he cannot afford the time. With the ablest children, however, it seems a pity not to treat grammar in this way, so that it becomes part of their active armoury instead of unrelated morsels of meaningless erudition. Obviously, the subtle distinctions between types of clause¹ may need to come later – if they have to be dealt with at all – but my own experience suggests that some such preliminary groundwork makes them much more easily understood.

Wherever the teacher decides to draw the line, however, he may well be sceptical of common assumptions about the kind of things children of *average* ability can do. The tendency all too often has been to remove all exacting challenge from textbooks for such pupils, but as long as the grammatical work can be related to self-expression there seems no reason why it should not be demanding. There can be nothing much more illogical than a brief, half-convinced, simple grammar section on adverbs, followed, after an interval of ten chapters, by another section containing simple sentence-joining exercises.

This last topic is worth pursuing for a moment. Children of average ability who come from junior schools where undue emphasis has been placed on correctness and neatness often write like this:²

POSTMAN

The postman opened the gate. He started walking up the path. He walked with a limp. He had black dusty shoes, black trousers his trousers had a red strip down. He also had a white shirt on with a black tie. He had nearly reach the door when he started searching for a letter for our house. He pulled a parcel out he held it gently with his large hands. He knocked at the door and I answered then he handed me the parcel. When he had given me the parcel he slowly walked down the path whistling. He had a cheerful smile also.

Obviously the lesson of the full stop has been pretty well learned, but the result is cramped, inflexible, unattractive writing. During the first two years of secondary school, children of this type and ability will need practice in the use of 'joining-words'. In such practice, punctuation and rudimentary grammar must go hand in hand: the children need to know that the choice that continually faces them in their writing is not between a full stop and a comma, but between a full stop and a conjunction.³ Most written exercises in joining sentences

¹ For example, that between adverbial clauses of degree and result, which is frequently most unsatisfactorily dealt with in textbooks.

² Written by a first-year girl of secondary modern A/B-stream ability.

³ As suggested earlier, to mention the comma with first-year children of only moderate ability merely confuses the issue by distracting attention from what is fundamental.

have by themselves little carry-over value, but oral drill along similar relatively traditional lines may be an effective introduction where the class is subsequently required to introduce the technique in their own continuous writing. Children need to realise why this is being asked of them and humorous exaggerations of some common weaknesses may help to make this clear, the aim being not so much to prove something *incorrect* as to show that it is inadequate, boring, monotonous. The most common weaknesses that lend themselves to the kind of parody suggested are the ways in which 'and' and 'then' are flogged to death:

I get up *and* go to the bathroom *and* wash *and* go downstairs *and* have my breakfast *and* pack my satchel *and* open the front door *and* go to the bus stop *and* a bus comes *and* I get on *and* get off at school.

OR:

I get up *then* I go to the bathroom, *then* I wash and *then* I go downstairs . . . (and so on).

Most children will laugh at these parodies, particularly if they are read by the teacher with the characteristic breathlessness of a small child's narrative. This last point is important in bringing home the relationship - and the difference - between speech and writing. They need to be faced with a demand for greater deliberation, coupled with a recognition of some of the ways in which the written work is inevitably less expressive than the spoken. Generally, however, they will not merely laugh but will offer many suggestions for improving the accounts of everyday actions. Their suggestions will almost inevitably include some temporal conjunctions which can then be practised, separately, in oral drill, using the same basic material as before:

When I get up, I go to the bathroom. *When* I have washed I go downstairs. . . .

'After', 'while', 'since' and 'as' may be given similar practice very rapidly around the class. With most sets I would favour introducing, shortly afterwards, the participial phrase as an alternative to the 'when'-construction.

Drill of this kind can be much more intensive and much more lively when it is oral. By this means we seek to establish that any device can be monotonous if used too often: to have every sentence beginning with 'when' is scarcely preferable to the similar (incorrect) use of 'then'. Again, children need to see that more than correctness is required and that a series of short, correct, simple sentences may be lamentably uninteresting.¹ After such drill, the children may be asked to use two

¹ Much of this work is very closely related to the development of a rhythmic sense, of the 'inner ear', which I shall be dealing with in the last section of this chapter.

or three of the conjunctions they have practised orally in writing about the same (or a similar) series of actions as that parodied.

In suggesting ways of improving the accounts, the children may well have suggested words introducing adjectival rather than adverbial constructions and the same technique may now be used to encourage the use of various types of adjective. A possible context for this might be the description of the people and objects in the classroom. Whatever subject is chosen, however, the pupils need to discover the inadequacy of some sentences without adjectives, and to consider the extent to which they might be improved by the addition of simple epithets. Again, however, they must see that this is a situation in which no rule but their own judgment is to guide them; the teacher's aim in introducing the concept of adjectival function is simply to encourage the most vivid and most flexible description and they must share with him the process of evaluation. We cannot leave them with the idea that the sentence 'The heartless man cruelly struck the frightened dog' is *necessarily* better than the more economical and vigorous 'The man struck the dog.' They need therefore to learn from experience – from wallowing in adjectives – that an excessive number of simple descriptive epithets has a clogging and cloying effect.¹ Such a discovery should goad them to experiment with other – more complex – types of adjective. They may have learnt from oral experiments, for example, that they require subtler tools if they are to attempt to describe each other adequately – that 'big', 'brown' and 'bad' do not really tell us very much. They must discover that 'who had a wart on his nose' is as much an adjective as 'ugly', that it defines more accurately a feature of a particular person – the 'who-had-a-wart-on-his-nose'-man.

Often the play-element in oral work like this may tend to improve the general fluency of their expression. It is generally easy and thus it breeds the confidence that must be established before oral work can be free and vigorous. For this reason it is possible to use, even with backward children,² techniques like those suggested. I have found them quite capable of learning to use, for instance, relative pronouns, as the result of oral drill in which they composed double statements about objects in the room, e.g.

The desk, which has two drawers, is in the centre of the room.

The window, which is open, is painted white.

¹ In all work of this type the importance of class composition recorded by teacher on the blackboard can hardly be over-emphasised. Often a whole period can be spent profitably discussing and arguing over the first two sentences and the merits of suggested emendations.

² By this I do not mean the educationally subnormal, of course, but children of roughly average ability (I.Q. 90-100) though of below-average attainment.

Again there may be an enjoyable play-element in all this, which tends to make the lessons they have learnt easier to recall and ensures that they make some attempt to apply them in their writing.

The following extract, written by a boy of approximately the same ability and on the same subject as the girl previously quoted, will I hope suffice to suggest the possibility of effective carry-over from oral drill to narrative writing. It is not very flexible, but it shows a clear attempt to apply something of what he had learned from a series of exercises on temporal conjunctions of exactly the type already described.

THE POST MAN

As I look threw the window I see the postman coming down the garden path splashing the rain up in the puddle with is thick shinney heavy boots.

As he gets near the door, he takes the letter out of his wet dripping sack then he stretches out his hand and opens the letter box. Then with the other hand he shuves the letter threw.

After that he starts walking down the garden path again. Having shut the garden gate he starts trugging, along the pavement to the next house.

In conclusion, the teaching of grammar may play a significant part in the development of positive, critical discipline. The two essential conditions for this are firstly the provision of an interesting and challenging context for the trying out of new skills, and secondly the active encouragement of vigorous and intensive experimentation in which grammar, punctuation and vocabulary work are closely related so that the emphasis, instead of being upon breaking down or analysis, is upon building up.¹ Children of sound ability may be aided by the possession of a technical vocabulary which enables the teacher to comment economically upon their work. The teacher must beware, as I have already suggested, of any tendency to underestimate the average child's ability to assimilate simple grammatical concepts – provided the work context is an interesting one and the technical points dealt with are relevant to, and likely to improve, his own self-expression and critical sensitivity.

★

Figurative Language

2. State what rhetorical devices are used in the following and write down under their respective headings all the examples of each that it contains:

'... All slumbers save the multiplex rustle of our new Berline. Loose-skirted scarecrow of an Herb-merchant, with his ass and early greens, toilsomely plodding, seems the only creature we meet. But right ahead the great

¹ Even with the ablest children a full grasp of academic grammar may best be achieved in this way: it is both more useful and more intellectually exacting to learn to construct sentences on various grammatical patterns than it is to pull someone else's to pieces.

North-east sends up evermore his gray, brindled, dawn; from the dewy branch, birds here and there, with short deep warble, salute the coming sun. Stars fade out, and Galaxies; street-lamps of the City of God. The Universe, O my brothers, is flinging wide its portals for the Levee of the Great High King. . . .

from 'Exercises on Figures of Speech (Questions set at the University of London Matriculation.)' in *A General Certificate English Course* by Lancelot Oliphant, published by Cassell & Co.¹

The reader may smile at this, feeling that such exercises belong to a curious, bygone age – that they are quaint antiques, interesting but unconnected with enlightened modern method. It is true that the days are gone when a knowledge of the intricacies of zeugma, litotes and prolepsis were an important part of training in English, but something of the same basic approach is nevertheless still common. Thus many – if not most – children who learn about figurative language are introduced to the subject via exercises in the detection, or completion, of similes – exercises that are not different in kind from those of forty years ago.²

Such exercises as these may be used to promote a critical understanding of what one means by ossified language, and this is quite valuable; used uncritically, however, so far from promoting an understanding of language, they often amount to a positive training in the use of cliché. Thus one finds, in another textbook published only ten years ago, an alphabetical list of similes which contains such gems as the following:

- as sacred as a shrine.
- as sad as night – as doom.
- as safe as a tortoise under its shell – as a blackhouse – a sardine.
- as salt as a sea-sponge – as brine.
- as saucy as the wave.
- as scarce as hens' teeth – as feathers on a fish.

¹ Significantly, the quotation is taken from the 1955 (15th) impression of this work, originally published in 1928 under the title *A Matriculation English Course*.

² Thus Oliphant, *op. cit.* (1928) p. 170:

'Explain, and if possible account for, the following expressions:

- i. He is an unlicked cub.
- ii. The result was after all but a Cadmean victory.

- iii. He set out to plough his lonely furrow . . .'

Cf. Ridout, *English Today*, (1948), Bk III, p. 55:

'Identify the similes and metaphors in the following. Explain why they are similes and metaphors, and comment upon their effectiveness.

- 1. The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold.
- 2. The Question Master was bombarded with questions.
- 3. She was sunk in the depths of despair. . . .'

Admittedly, the more recent example makes things a little easier for the pupil and the final injunction speciously implies a relationship between work of this kind and critical discrimination, but that is all.

as secret as thought.
as secure as the grave.

and - symbolically, I feel - 'as seedy as a raspberry.'¹

It seems probable that children need to understand ossified language in order to see figurative language, generally, as part of a natural impulse to classify new things by comparison with more familiar objects. This tendency is clearly evident in the name of things invented recently, such as *fountain-pen*, *broadcasting*, *spaceship*, *hovercraft*, etc. Our pupils need to be made aware of the dynamic quality of language and to appreciate that much of what is now impoverished was once itself new and vivid, springing from an original insight into a resemblance between apparently dissimilar objects. They must see the distinction between figurative language that is now purely literal (the *face* of a clock, or the *legs* of a chair) and may safely be used, and figurative language which is merely stale and outworn, and which should be avoided since it is no longer capable of evoking more than an automatic or superficial response in the reader.

So much for the negative side. Work such as this must involve also some examination of the motivation that underlies the use of figures in everyday speech. One fairly common way of leading up to this is to compare the relative inadequacy of literal language with what Ted Hughes has called the 'explosive compression'² of poetry or poetic prose. Provided this does not involve a demand that the children should *admire* something but should be left completely free to draw their own conclusions, this may be an effective exercise. They might, for example, compare the following passages:

- A. The gale, which had momentarily lessened in force, suddenly became intense again, making a high-pitched and seemingly dangerous noise around the village, which was situated in a very exposed position on an elevated, rounded, projecting part of the hill.
- B. The gale, which had lulled for a little while, came swooping back with a shriek and a beating as of great wings against the village that crouched on the bare hill-shoulder, huddling close to the ground, as though for safety . . .³

Such a comparison as this generally elicits good comments from a class: what one hopes for is not a statement that one passage is 'better' than the other, but that the second suggests an infinite number of

¹ From *The Student's Companion* by Wilfred D. Best, former Inspector of Schools, Trinidad, B.W.I., published by Collins, p. 92. I like the way in which the title suggests that the book is a veritable *vade mecum*.

² I shall return to this in Chapter 8.

³ The opening sentence of Rosemary Sutcliff's splendid book, *The Outcast*, Oxford University Press. The imagery throughout the book is unusually rich and this may partly explain the author's success in evoking a primitive world.

things which the reader can feel almost in his bones but would have great difficulty in explaining and which are by no means adequately covered in the paraphrase. They should, for example, be able to comment at some length on the evocative quality of such words as 'crouched', as well as noting the effect of the sustained comparison between the gale and a bird of prey. Before allowing them to attempt any definition of the kind of language used in the passage, however, we might approach the motivation behind it in a more homely way.

Let us imagine a child rushing home to tell his parents about something extraordinary or exciting. In his excitement he fumbles for words that will be in any way adequate to capture his experience. He becomes almost angry at the discrepancy between the ideas and feelings that are boiling over inside him – and which he so urgently needs to communicate – and the actual words that come out of his mouth. 'Mummy . . . it was HUGE, . . . it was . . . [and finally the anticlimax of capitulation] . . . ever so big!' He has failed in his 'intolerable wrestle with words and their meanings' – his baffled exasperation parallels that of Coleridge when faced with the task of conveying the intense visual excitement of his experiences amongst the mountains.¹ If the child has really been fired he will not easily accept defeat, and it will come out again, even more urgently than before – 'Mummy – it was . . . it was like a . . . like a —.'

There it is at last – the mechanism of comparison, the search for some analogy that may bring home – to that patient, but rather stupid, mother, who seems so very slow to catch on – just *how enormous*, or *how fabulous* his experience has been.

All this may seem a long and devious approach to an idea that is not so very difficult. But by the time we have finished such an account we may at least be sure that figurative language will seem clearly relevant to their condition: they will not need to be told that what happened to the child happens also to them. They will have shared his frustration; they also will recognise the agonising inadequacy of their 'halting circumlocutions.'² The fact that the teacher has shown that he understands this difficulty will tend to inspire both interest and confidence, and they will now eagerly search out examples of figurative language *in their own writing*.

After such an introduction, an able second- or third-year class should be able to examine more carefully the different impact of two passages such as those quoted. The importance of questioning in this work once again needs emphasis: the teacher is there to lead the children on, from

¹ *Vide supra*, p. 13.

² Coleridge, once again.

the consideration of particulars to the framing of certain generalisations about figurative language which can then be re-tested. They must think, not admire; they must see why such language is used and in what way it is interesting to the reader.

At this stage, or perhaps a little later, their distrust of language which invites a merely automatic response may need to be reinforced. They might even end up by writing a parody of a textbook exercise, in narrative form, using only dead (or dying) metaphors and similes. Incidentally, it seems to me that in the early stages – and certainly for the less able children – the division of figurative language into types is superfluous. What is primarily needed is to see the essential difference between figurative and literal. We must therefore concentrate, not upon analytical understanding, but upon the relevance of figurative language to their own writing so that they see this as another aspect of the search for accuracy, for the full, adequate communication of their experience.

Before playing about with anything so sophisticated as parodies of textbooks, however, they should have followed up the discovery of figurative language naturally and unconsciously used in their previous written work, by conscious experimentation with this new tool. If these exercises can be made enjoyable – possibly by the provision of some lively or even extravagant context – we may be more certain that the basic concept will be meaningful. It is also very useful, when revising, to be able to say with confidence, 'You remember that exercise we did, "wallowing" in metaphors and similes? Well . . .' Here are some early attempts by able second-year children¹ to do just this. It will be seen that, as suggested in the chapter on Critical Discipline, the children subsequently checked and noted some of the figurative language they had used.

FOREST FIRE

1. Scowling low as it crept stealthily across the overgrown forest its fangs jagged out quickly to the unsuspecting trees. And quickly as it flamed up

¹ Though I have suggested that such work may best be carried out in the second and third years, there is no reason why it should not be undertaken earlier, if the teacher desires. The following passage was written by a first-year girl, of sound grammar school ability, after an explanation of figurative language and some oral practice:

'A Fire'

'It began as a lighted match and when dropped by a careless passbyer[!] it wriggled like an eel into the form of a flame. Slowly it licked the barks of the trees as it crept on its way. Gradually it grew into a forest fire, roaring like a thundering train. The burning trees crashed to the ground like the roar of a bomb. The foresters fought a great battle but the flames just laughed and grew even stronger. Its strength grew like a gigantic wave as it lurched forward. Like the lion after its prey the flames crept after the bushes and devoured them with its fiery teeth. Slowly the great monster's strength weakened, and like a withering leaf falling from a tree died silently. The woods, now a great ruin, stood dead and silent.'

higher into the sky it darts forward scorching the ground with its swiftness and like a hot panting animal it leaps and blows forth hot panting breath into the already darkened air. Giagantic overgrown tremendous fire animal, creeping, stretching down and up catching its prey and devouring it, leaving only ashes to be kicked around by school children. Mountaineering over the pines and the oaks, roaring along at a tremendous speed like a monkey swinging from one to another.

Similes – like a hot panting animal, like a monkey.

Metaphors – scowling, leaps, swinging.

2. Like a hungry giant eating everything in sight the fire swept on. Birds scattered like criminals on the run with the police close behind. Firey timbers fell like factory chimnies being demolished. The heat was terrific made worse by the dense smoke. The fire forged its way on through what was now left of the forest, now a smouldering wreck. The fire left the forest looking like a battlefield after a great battle.

Similes – like a hungry giant, criminals on the run, factory chimnies being demolished, a battlefield after a great battle.

Metaphor – swept, forged.

3. Like a giant monster it devours the undergrowth eating every green thing in its path. Trees fall like skittles being knocked down by a ball. Great tongues of flame lick at the bushes like a lizard pounsing on an unsuspecting prey. Small animals scurry away as if chased by their greatest enemy. Dry grass is devoured in an instant by great hungry looking flames. Houses go up like beacons trying to warn the country that there is a fire. Peoples possetions are burnt as the fire like an attacking enemy swoops down. Birds flutter up into the blackened sky unable to stay secure in their nests but on and on the fire sweeps leaving nothing but a black devastated land.

Similes – giant monster, skittles being knocked down by a ball, a lizard pouncing on an unsuspecting prey, as if chased by their greatest enemy, beacons trying to warn the country, like an attacking enemy.

4. The flames leap above the huddling trees licking up the brown, shrivelled leaves from their homes on the snakelike branches. Swirling round the scurrying animals, like a whirlwind appearing out of nowhere. Then glaring at everything around, they suddenly wrap themselves about the terrified objects in front of them, and soon turn them into ashes. Dropping to the ground as if with exhaustion, a tall slender tree, with twigs like witches fingers, suddenly falls towards the roaring monstrous flames and is seen no more. A doe which is resting nearby soon becomes aware of this terrifying creature, with an enormous tongue which laps up anything it can find, and tries to get away from it. But the flames are gradually drawing in on the poor animal, and it is not long before there is nothing left of it at all. But still the fire tears through the forest, destroying everything that does not escape from this deadly enemy.

Similes – like a whirlwind appearing out of nowhere, as if with exhaustion, like witches fingers, snake-like branches.

Metaphors – leap, huddling, licking, swirling, glaring, wrap, laps, tears, tongue, terrifying creature.

If the teacher desires, and provided the initial response has been encouraging, the children may attempt to sustain a particular metaphor throughout a short passage. I suggested earlier how helpful it is to be able to remind the children of particular exercises already done; thus before asking them to attempt to sustain metaphor in this way, I recalled the way Rosemary Sutcliff developed the bird of prey image in the description of the storm already quoted. After this revision, the class¹ were asked to attempt something similar by writing not just on 'Fog', but on the title 'My Enemy, the Fog'. The three passages which follow are unequal² but in places the wallowing in figurative language has sparked off a real, personal vividness. This is as much as one ought perhaps to expect from experimental work of this kind - one cannot demand the conscious manipulation of a technique at the same time as the complete imaginative concentration at which we aim in purely creative work, but the two overlap and the conscious, technical practice should ultimately improve the quality of the latter. At any rate, the writers of the following extracts experimented with some gusto.

MY ENEMY, THE FOG

1. Thick overpowering and dirty, is it friend or foe? My answer is foe. Grimy and slithering entangling itself around your body moving with you slobbering over you never clearing never stopping until it lurches in some dark alley waiting to grab or pounce out at some unknowing passer by. To crowd round the cold shivering person and tell them to go that way, to push and shove them, until they go and have to grovell their way in the darkness down another unforbiding street. Like an overgrowing baby it clings to you like a leech.
2. It creeps nearer in to me,
Gradually my vision drops to zero.
The light from the lampposts
Gets dimmer as if a giant had cast
His big hands over the light.
I feel the presence of an enemy, near me.
I reach out but fail to grasp it.
I sense eyes looking at me
But I know fog can deceive,
The fog was clinging on to me like sticky treacle.
I twist and turn, trying to lose it
And gratefully stumble up the
Steps of my home.

¹ The same one as before.

² The mind boggles at the images with which the first passage ends - at fog which 'like an overgrowing baby . . . clings to you like a leech'. Part of the virtue of this free experimentation is a direct result of such inequality, however: the children's own writing generally provides excellent examples of both the effective and the horribly inappropriate, and consideration of these enables them to sharpen their critical powers.

3. The fog creeps along towards me like a cloud of grey smoke, rising up from the ground, and enveloping me. As I gaze gloomily through my window at the nearby house it gradually disappears, until all I can see of it, is as faint black outline. Dim orange lights can be seen glimmering through the thick mist, as long lines of vehicles move steadily along the bumpy road. A small girl is standing close to the edge of the footpath outside, not sure whether it is safe to cross the road, as she tries to listen hard for anything coming. Then thinking that it is alright to go across, she hurries over – just in time as a bike suddenly comes into view, as she steps onto the damp grass on the other side. But still the damp, dark enemy stealthily moves on, hungrily wrapping itself around everything it can find. The air smells moist, and soon nothing else can be seen, except dense, grey, gloomy fog.

This early experimentation must be aimed primarily at the extension of the children's capacity to express themselves, and in order to achieve this they must enjoy it – otherwise the techniques tried out will remain alien to them. Its effectiveness need not end here, however. If appetite has been created, discrimination will follow. The child who has enjoyed playing with figurative language naturally becomes more sensitive to its use by other writers, poets especially. In the first place he becomes much more receptive to visual images, so that he can instantly see – and subsequently comment on – the effectiveness of the figurative language in a poem like Lawrence's 'Bat'¹ –

... Dark air-life looping
Yet missing the pure loop ...
A twitch, a twitter, an elastic shudder in flight
And serrated wings against the sky,
Like a glove, a black glove thrown up at the light,
And falling back. . . .

Accurate visualisation in comprehension, as in imaginative composition, is the beginning of the process by which he learns to lose himself in creative expression or creative response. He must learn not only to visualise, however, but also to feel. When he can read, for example, the Roethke poem 'Child on top of a Greenhouse'² and can understand the compressed visual, physical, moral and emotional suggestion of the apparently simple lines –

My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,
The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers.

– when he can do this, he has reached at least the threshold of mature sensibility.



¹ Already referred to at some length in Chapter 1, p. 29.

² Quoted in full on p. 35.

*Sound and Rhythm in Language — the Development of an
'Inner Ear'*

... both words and tune observing quantity, and more fit lively to expresse
divers passions, by the low and lofty sounde of the well-weyed silable. . . .

Sir Philip Sidney, *Apologie for Poetrie*

We come now to an area of linguistic experience which is often almost totally neglected in the teaching of academic children and which in the teaching of all children receives insufficient attention. In this section, which I have tentatively headed 'sound and rhythm in language', I shall be concerned with another aspect of active response, with the development of sensitivity to language which — in Sidney's words again — 'strieth a certaine musick to the eare'.

It is true that nowadays in the training of academic children considerable emphasis is placed on sensitive response to language. At the same time, in the examination of the less able, a new stress is being laid upon oral fluency. Ultimately, however, the effectiveness of both these emphases will to a large extent depend upon the possession by the child of a properly trained 'inner ear' — upon his capacity to hear the passage as he reads it. Unless this ability has been developed, any exacting, critical appreciation of poetry is doomed from the outset and, more obviously, the child will be unable to make his speech a flexible and interesting expression of his individual personality.

I have continually urged the importance of using or playing with the 'tools', of the need for zestful linguistic exploration and experiment. This is nowhere more necessary than in the child's use of his voice and in his discovery of the potentialities of language in terms of sound and rhythm. Once again, too, the early years in secondary school are of prime importance: it is possible so to encourage expressive and adventurous speech in the first and second years that even the perplexities of adolescence do not seriously inhibit such expression, but it is doubtful whether much can be achieved if the effort is delayed until the third year.

As will be apparent to the reader, I am venturing in this section on the training of the inner ear, upon yet another specialised field which requires a book in its own right.¹ Once again I must plead, in justification of my temerity, that I am aiming not at a complete but an

¹The reader is referred in the Bibliography to some books which treat the subject fully.

integrated survey of the subject. This seems particularly necessary at the present time with its growing tendency towards specialisation.¹

The very fact that school 'specialists' in speech (and/or drama) are becoming more numerous, while it can only do good in emphasising the real importance of these subjects, may have some unfortunate side-effects. The creation of such special posts, for example, may suggest a tacit approval of the idea that these aspects of English lie outside the scope of the 'normal' teacher, an attitude which was already sufficiently common and sufficiently harmful to be in no need of encouragement. Obviously, not all English teachers will feel competent to teach speech and drama adequately but, while it is probably better for any teacher to omit speech, drama, poetry or whatever it may be, rather than to teach it without either confidence or conviction,² there is surely no reason for him to remain satisfied with this state of affairs. He may indeed be abrogating an integral part of his responsibility.

Thus it is that more is required of the speech and drama specialist than the appropriate expertise. He needs also an evangelising streak that will make sufficient impact upon staff colleagues to ensure that work in other English periods is properly related to what he himself is doing. His function in a large school is therefore not merely to teach the children but also to convert the teachers: he must constantly be seeking ways of encouraging some of the more diffident to try for themselves some of his techniques. Those who remain unwilling – sometimes for very good reasons – to make such an attempt have a clear obligation to know at least what he is doing in order to encourage their own pupils to see English *as a whole*. Conversely, it is the specialist's responsibility to take sufficient interest in the rest of the English syllabus³ for him to be able to see, and to suggest to his colleagues, possible ways of integrating their respective efforts.

The necessity for such an integration derives partly from the fact that much comprehension work is meaningless unless the child can respond sensitively – though not necessarily, at first, aloud – to aspects

¹ Cf. *The Examining of English Language*, The Eighth Report of the Secondary School Examinations Council, H.M.S.O., 1964. Speaking of tests in spoken English, the report stresses the need for this aspect of English to be more widely catered for in universities and training colleges –

‘... but not in such a way as to establish yet another specialism, taught by fanatics for phonetics inexpert in written English and its literature. On the contrary the teacher's task should be to link firmly the teaching of all aspects of English, by revealing the essential relationship between speaking and writing it.’ (para. 104, p. 24.)

² Cf. George Sampson, *English for the English*, Cambridge University Press, p. 107. ‘There is no crime in not having the ear for literature or music, the crime is lacking the ear and persisting in spoiling the song.’

³ Ideally, I feel, he should take at least one class for *all* their English.

of the writing such as pace, mood, contrast, and pure sound. Thus, it seems to me, one of the most useful questions one can ask about a poem is - 'How would you read this, and why?'¹ In all our exploration of rhythm and sound the emphasis must still be upon whetting appetite, on encouraging an active response, and on attacking remorselessly (though not necessarily explicitly) any assumption that reading is a passive occupation.

As already suggested, the foundations of success or failure are laid in the first two years in the secondary school. It is not merely that these years are free from the crippling and inhibiting effects of adolescence - the characteristic attitudes of children of this age are positively in our favour. With their lack of self-consciousness goes a natural effervescence which we must seek to utilise. It is significant that much of the material used by Iona and Peter Opie in their admirable book, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, was collected from children aged eleven and twelve. The authors are at pains to emphasise the vigour of this oral tradition.

... they seem to have a chant on their lips as constantly as they have a comic in their hands, or a sweet in their mouth.

There are those which are essential to the regulation of their games and their relationships with each other; and there are those, seemingly almost as necessary to them, which are mere expressions of exuberance: a discordant symphony of jingles, slogans, nonsense verses, tongue-twisters, macabre rhymes, popular songs, parodies, joke rhymes and improper verses...

Not only do these chants offer an outlet for their characteristic exuberance, however; as the Opies point out

These rhymes are more than playthings to children. They seem to be one of their means of communication with each other. Language is still new to them, and they find difficulty in expressing themselves. When on their own they burst into rhyme, of no recognizable relevancy, as a cover in unexpected situations, to pass off an awkward meeting, to fill a silence, to hide a deeply felt emotion, or in a gasp of excitement. And through these quaint ready-made formulas the ridiculousness of life is underlined, the absurdity of the adult world and their teachers proclaimed, danger and death mocked, and the curiosity of language itself is savoured.²

As the authors have emphasised, much of the basic material of the children's oral tradition is part of an essentially primitive, private world - and we need to respect this. This is of course scope for the

¹ Another point of necessary integration is suggested by the fatuous practice of asking children who have never been trained to talk and discuss in class to write 'discussion essays'. All that some are ever taught to do, in this context, is to discuss 'a possible plan' - as if the bottle were more important than the wine! *Vide infra*, p. 154 ff.

² Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 17-18.

tactful teacher to use much that actually appears in the Opies' book, but the vital point is that all the evidence indicates the existence of an immense reservoir of energy and interest – waiting to be tapped. Speaking of the children's experimentation with figurative language, I used the term 'wallowing'; some similar concept is needed here. Perhaps one cannot do better than to encourage the children – in the authors' phrase – to 'savour the curiosity of language'. Whatever expression one uses, however, the need is to create opportunities for enjoyable, wide, vigorous experiment.¹ They must let their hair down.

Depending on the classroom atmosphere prevailing at the junior school they have just left, there may be a greater or lesser reluctance to do this – a reluctance no doubt aggravated by their awe at new and strange surroundings. Such inhibitions soon disappear, however. In some cases, the example of the teacher letting down his own hair may have the desired effect, but there is some danger of his superior skill and technical accomplishment being too evident and thus inhibiting, rather than encouraging, the children who are listening to him. It is of the utmost importance that he should read well² but, if he is seeking to provoke emulation, he must beware of 'showing off': the teacher who is properly sensitive to the reactions of his pupils will know just how far he may go.

In view of these potential difficulties, it may be a good idea to undertake the initial 'setting free' away from the physically and emotionally cramping classroom, perhaps as part of a mime lesson in a hall, gym or other open space. Here, curiously enough, the teacher's example is more likely to produce a positive response, perhaps because all children act and the difference between his ability and theirs in this respect is much less marked. (Often, of course, they may prove to be much more capable mimics than he is himself.) Gradually choral speech³ may be introduced, sometimes running parallel with mime. In both mime and speech work the freer physical environment of a hall leads generally to a more rapid development of confidence and willingness to experiment: because it is conducive to uninhibited physical expression – as some teachers will have learnt to their cost – so it tends to encourage more vigorous vocal expression.

To the cynical maths master, who happens to pass the hall, the

¹ This should not merely include relatively formal exercises like choral speaking, but also sheer fooling about with words. For encouraging this kind of 'goonery' a tape-recorder is invaluable. The sooner it is realised that *every teacher* – not merely every English department – should have such an instrument in his room, the sooner we are likely to see speech-work assume its proper place in the teaching of English.

² On this point see also Chapter 8, pp. 180–1 especially.

³ The particular advantage of this in the early stage is simply that it involves everybody.

process that I have called 'setting-free' may appear as little less than an anarchistic incitement to rioting and worse. Even the English teacher, hoarse-voiced at the end of such a lesson, may tend to wonder what he has achieved. No rules can be given for the control of lessons like these, each teacher has to develop his own method: some will prefer to impose a measure of discipline from the start; others may be content to let the class evolve a discipline of their own. The curious fact remains that radically different approaches – provided they are backed up by conviction, enthusiasm and sympathy – tend to produce comparable results. There must always, however, be considerable freedom to begin with. In this, as in much other English work, the teacher's relation to his pupils is something like that of a small boy to his bottle of 'pop': he puts his thumb over the mouth of the bottle and shakes it up; he enjoys watching it fizz and feeling the pressure build up; and then, when the moment is right, he points the bottle, removes his thumb and watches the liquid shoot out – in a predetermined direction. Similarly, there must be fizz; there must be pressure; and there must be release, along a particular channel we have chosen.

At some stage, when the children have relaxed sufficiently for their natural ebullience to be tapped, most of the oral work may be continued in the classroom.¹ It may now be found that the restriction of desks, etc., is positively helpful: it prevents natural energy being released wastefully and irrelevantly – in physical movement, for example, or in mere shouting. Within the classroom or not, we continue to savour the curiosity of language and to wallow in words. This enjoyable extension of experience can be accomplished in various ways but the method is unimportant so long as the work contributes to our general aim of 'heightened awareness'. For detailed suggestions, I would prefer the teacher to the authorities mentioned at the end of this chapter, contenting myself with suggesting a few types of experimentation that contribute towards this main aim.

Firstly, perhaps, we might place the idea of physical awareness and conscious use of the voice and breathing mechanism. Ideally, this could be covered simultaneously in biology or general science, but the teachers of these subjects may find this undesirable or difficult to arrange; in any case many books on speech contain suitable diagrams. The explanation need be neither very full nor very technical, but it should be stressed that the mechanics of the voice are often very interesting to children, the novelty of an English teacher's attempting

¹ In any case this may be necessary, since facilities are generally limited and school halls much in demand.

to explain such things with 'scientific' diagrams intrigues them, and thus the teacher is from the beginning assured of good co-operation from the class.

Whether or not some attempt is made to sketch in this technical background, we need to encourage an enjoyment of the sound and texture of words – an enjoyment that is frankly sensuous.

The children's palates are not fine, of course, but they can learn to savour words with 'strenuous tongue', perhaps even to become slightly intoxicated with them as Keats did, one feels, when he wrote about

'. . . beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple stained mouth.'¹

On a less elevated plane there is at least an element of sensuous pleasure in the tongue-twisters of childhood, as is amply borne out by the material in the Opies' book where the authors lay particular stress upon 'the child's delight in the coincidence of sound' (as proved by the perennial popularity of Peter Piper, for example). Their enjoyment of alliteration is linked to a love of nonsense, and they like to make up words, as did this eleven-year-old boy, imitating Lear with gusto and some skill:

THE DISAPPEARING MIRABEE

The mirabee has a horrible knack
Of standing just behind your back
And when to see him you turn round
He disappears beneath the ground
It's quite impossible to see
That disappearing mirabee.

or in this:

THE GARGAPOTAPANTAPUS

The gargapotapantapus is larger than a London bus,
He gives enormous wheezes
He has gigantic sneezes
He holds his nose with might and main
But always sneezes just the same.

Obviously the work of Lear and Carroll are valuable sources of material to stimulate imitation and enjoyment of pure nonsense. Each teacher will have his own favourites but among the less obvious sources of alliterative models I have found parts of Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and translations of *Beowulf* particularly useful. The extent to which the

¹ How many fifth- and sixth-formers grasp the sensuous quality of lines such as these by an intellectual effort, rather than by *feeling*, savouring simultaneously the lip movement of drinking and articulating the words, and feeling the fragility of the bubble miraculously conveyed by the opening of the lips on 'winking'.

children are encouraged to imitate writing such as this must largely depend on whether they have enjoyed the original enough for them to want to imitate it. With academic children, however, the collecting of odd skills is sometimes an end in itself, and they are proud to be able to brandish words like onomatopoeia and alliteration. I think we should indulge them in this, provided what they write is ultimately designed to be heard – *to be read aloud*. This ensures that these terms become their own tools instead of abstract instruments of analysis. The following brief extract shows a second-year boy experimenting with alliteration and enjoying the exercise:

A bulldozer came blustering banging bellowing smoke from its clumsy clanging pipe. Ploughing, plodding and pondering its way through the dirty damp dirt. The tracks crashing and crumping the grubby ground. Clumsily it clawed, clung and clutched at the bank to drag its heavy hulking body out of the ditch.

Since the interest of spoken language only partially depends on the shape and texture of the words themselves, we need also to emphasise expression and mood; if we are teaching the subject more technically we shall perhaps also amuse ourselves by playing around with the stresses on words in a sentence and by examining the consequent variations in its musical shape.¹ To begin with, one may use short poems suggestive of a single, uncomplicated mood – often poetry of a relatively primitive type: laments and battle-songs, for example. The psalms – whose usefulness in another context will be dealt with in the next chapter – are particularly effective in this context; and so, less obviously, are Arthur Waley's translations of Chinese poems,² for example:

LOSING A SLAVE-GIRL

(AD 832)

Around my courtyard the little wall is low;
At the street door her loss was posted late.
I am ashamed to think we were not always kind;
I regret your labours, that will never be repaid.
The caged bird owes no allegiance;
The wind-tossed flower does not cling to the tree.

.

Where tonight she lies none can give us news;
Nor any knows, save the bright watching moon.

(*Op. cit.*, p. 166)

¹ Most texts on the subject give amusing exercises of this type. E.g. A. Lloyd James, *Our Spoken Language*, Nelson, pp. 132–58.

² See, for example, the paperback edition of these published by Unwin Books.

THE COCK-FIGHT

by Ts'ao Chih

Our wandering eyes are sated with the dancer's skill,
 Our ears are weary with the sound of 'kung' and 'shang'.*
 Our host is silent and sits doing nothing;
 All the guests go on to places of amusement.

On long benches the sportsmen sit ranged
 Round a cleared room, watching the fighting-cocks.
 The gallant birds are all in battle-trim;
 They raise their tails and flap defiantly.
 Their beating wings stir the calm air;
 Their angry eyes gleam with a red light.

Where their beaks have struck, the fine feathers are scattered;
 With their strong talons they wound again and again.
 Their long cries enter the blue clouds;
 Their flapping wings tirelessly beat and throb.
 'Pray God the lamp-oil lasts a little longer,
 Then I shall not leave without winning the match!'

(p. 70)

(* Notes of the scale.)

SONG OF THE MEN OF CHIN-LING

(Marching back into the Capital)

by Hsieh T'iao (AD 464-499)

Chiang-nan* is a glorious and beautiful land
 And Chin-ling† an exalted and kingly province!
 The green canals of the city twist and coil
 And its high towers stretch up and up.
 Flying gables lean over the bridge-road;
 Drooping willows cover the Royal Aqueduct.
 Shrill flutes sing by the coach's awning,
 And reiterated drums bang near its painted wheels.
 The names of the deserving shall be presented at the Cloud Terrace;
 For those who have done valiantly rich reward awaits.

(p. 97)

* South-west of Nanking.

† 'South of the River.'

Now for something entirely different.

THE WAR SONG OF DINAS VAWR¹

The mountain sheep are sweeter,
 But the valley sheep are fatter;
 We therefore deemed it meet
 To carry off the latter.
 We made an expedition;
 We met a host and quelled it;
 We forced a strong position,
 And killed the men who held it.

¹ There is a magnificent recording of this by Dylan Thomas in the London Library of Recorded English.

On Dyfed's richest valley,
Where herds of kine were browsing,
We made a mighty sally,
To furnish our carousing.
Fierce warriors rushed to meet us;
We met them, and o'erthrew them.
They struggled hard to beat us;
But we conquered them, and slew them.

As we drove our prize at leisure,
The king marched forth to catch us:
His rage surpassed all measure,
But his people could not match us.
He fled to his hall-pillars;
And, ere our force we led off,
Some sacked his house and cellars,
While others cut his head off.

We there, in strife bewildering,
Spilt blood enough to swim in:
We orphaned many children,
And widowed many women.
The eagles and the ravens
We glutted with our foemen;
The heroes and the cravens,
The spearmen and the bowmen.

We brought away from battle,
And much their land bemoaned them,
Two thousand head of cattle,
And the head of him who owned them:
Ednyfed; King of Dyfed,
His head was borne before us;
His wine and beasts supplied our feasts,
And his overthrow, our chorus.

T. L. Peacock

I have found this poem to have particular advantages of a relatively unusual kind: quite apart from providing practice in expressive reading, it also positively demands that the words be savoured to the full. Children particularly enjoy reading it in a pseudo-Welsh accent! However distasteful this device may be to natives of the Principality, it does help the children to use *consciously* their full vocal equipment and induces really vigorous articulation. The considerable variety of expression in the poem also demands a really close attention to particular words. Thus 'sweeter' and 'fatter' need to be tasted, pronounced with a lingering, gluttonous, evilly meditative self-satisfaction. To establish this at the beginning makes it easier for the underlying note of

smugness to be brought out in the whole poem, though with subtle variations of tone and pace – as demanded, for instance in the line

Some sacked his house and cellars,
which leads on to the grimly humorous

While others cut his head off.

A similar device recurs later on, in the gory afterthought

And the head of him who owned them.

More obvious material for the first two years, in order simply to lead children to enjoy the sound of words for their own sake, is found in a wide range of poems employing strongly rhythmic effects, particularly those which also contain interesting variations of pace. Auden's 'Night Mail' will spring immediately to mind in this context, but another equally effective poem is Vachel Lindsay's 'The Congo'. I have found this an excellent poem on which to begin really intensive work, partly because of its wide range of pace, rhythm and mood, and partly because of its content. The fact that it is about primitive, uninhibited behaviour is particularly useful if one is seeking to bring out a bit of the latent savagery of some first-year class that is discouragingly decorous and prim. The poem is too long to quote in full, but here is the first section.

THE CONGO

1. *Their Basic Savagery*

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,
Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,
Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,
Pounded on the table,
Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom,
Hard as they were able,
Boom, boom, BOOM,
With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM.
THEN I had religion, THEN I had a vision.
I could not turn from their revel in derision.
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A GOLDEN TRACK.
Then along that riverbank
A thousand miles
Tattooed cannibals danced in files;
Then I heard the boom of the blood-lust song
And a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong.
And 'BLOOD' screamed the whistles and the fifes of the warriors,
'BLOOD' screamed the skull-faced lean witch-doctors,

'Whirl ye the deadly voo-doo rattle,
Harry the uplands,
Steal all the cattle,
Rattle-rattle, rattle-rattle,
Bing.
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM,'
A roaring, epic, rag-time tune
From the mouth of the Congo
To the Mountains of the Moon.
Death is an Elephant,
Torch-eyed and horrible,
Foam-flanked and terrible.
BOOM, steal the pygmies,
BOOM, kill the Arabs,
BOOM, kill the white men,
HOO, HOO, HOO.
Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost
Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host.
Hear how the demons chuckle and yell
Cutting his hands off, down in Hell.
Listen to the creepy proclamation,
Blown through the lairs of the forest-nation,
Blown past the white-ants' hill of clay,
Blown past the marsh where the butterflies play:-
'Be careful what you do,
Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,
And all of the other
Gods of the Congo,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you,
Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you.'

A further advantage of this particular poem may be noted – its suitability for application to mime and movement. I have often found that a preparatory period spent on primitive movements, sometimes using a rhythmic drum-beat,¹ has resulted in a much more vigorous rendering of the poem itself. It is also possible, of course, to introduce some stylised mime as an accompaniment to the reading. Since movement and body position partly determine the nature of the speech – you can more easily speak angrily if you clench your fists – it is somewhat illogical to separate them.

Words, rhythm, pace, mood – these are obviously not the only features one would need to stress. The 'normal' teacher will never feel satisfied, however, for he will never find time to do all that he feels ought to be done: he can only hope that what he does to improve their oral expression may serve to bring about an increase in awareness and sensitivity similar to that which he has been aiming at in their written work.

¹ One such exercise is described in Chapter 4.

These two aspects of their experience are not merely parallel, or similar – they are complementary. It is only by constantly reminding himself of the interdependence of all the facets of his subject that the teacher may avoid excessive routine and provide sufficient variety to sustain interest and make English a matter of excitement and constant discovery. The three topics I have so sketchily dealt with in this chapter were chosen primarily in an attempt to demonstrate this principle at work. I hope that the reader may find this becoming clearer throughout the next chapter, and that he may see at least some of the immensely varied and fascinating opportunities to make one activity flow naturally into, or out of, another. I have, for instance, thought briefly in this chapter about mood in oral work, and I shall shortly be dealing with some aspects of mood in the children's own writing. It should need no further emphasis that any treatment of the one cries out to be related to the other; that in the reading aloud of their own compositions lies one of the most obvious means of improving both. I should hesitate to underline this last point so ponderously, were it not for the fact that the child who is capable of writing with rare feeling and sensitivity is seldom capable of doing justice to what he has written – if we ask him to read it aloud, he will treat us to a flabby, monotonous, stumbling and apologetic interpretation of his own vigorous and interesting ideas. And if he cannot speak his own ideas with conviction, whose, then, can he be expected to interpret sensitively?¹

This is not all. Mood in writing and expressive speech are inadequately treated unless they are related to similar experiments in mime and movement work (and, ideally, in art and music as well).

¹ Let me once again urge the need for more tape-recorders in this connection.

7 – Whetting the Appetite - II

Playing with Ideas: Early work on Mood and Structure

I suggested in Chapter 2 that, for a variety of reasons, the child is beginning to need the support of some more formal descriptive technique by the time he nears the end of his second year. It should not be assumed, however, that the child has previously heard nothing of such techniques. If I have left them until now, it is because I felt that they would have tended to distract the reader from the essential topic – the development of the imagination. They are related to this, it is true, but they fall more obviously within the group of techniques which offer to the child in the first two years of secondary school an opportunity for varied and vigorous verbal experimentation; and which offer to the teacher powerful means of whetting the child's appetite.

I have also argued that much of the poverty of ideas that is apparent in the writing of adolescents stems from their never having learnt to use their senses, nor to realise the value and interest of everyday experience. Though this is crucial, it is not the whole story: there has been a critical (or technical) failure as well as an imaginative incapacity. Thus they have been allowed to remain incapable of differentiating between sterile ideas and those that are worthy of development and illustration. In addition to the relatively few pupils who have really nothing to say, we find many who write paragraphs each of which contains several potential main themes (or key sentences) and who therefore find that they have exhausted all their ideas after they have written a page or so.

Thus, though much of the work described might loosely be termed 'imaginative', the primary aim of this chapter is to suggest exercises that may at least partially remove the pupil's technical incapacity. I shall therefore concentrate on some of the ways children may learn to enjoy the deliberate, fanciful and even extravagant development of ideas, may learn to squeeze an idea – like an orange – to extract the maximum amount of juice. Moreover, this exercise is not merely enjoyable: it also

involves their critical faculty, since it leads pupils to differentiate between ideas according to some assessment of their importance and interest, to select and arrange them, and to see connections between two or more themes.



In 1958 a colleague drew my attention to a fascinating article which offered stimulating comment and advice on the writing of free verse and went on to suggest some interesting applications of the study of Old Testament parallelism. The whole thing is well worth reading but it is the latter aspect which concerns me now. Rather than emasculate the original by attempting to summarise it, I prefer to let the writer speak for himself on this point:

A species of modified free verse which I have tried has been that of O.T. parallelism. This seems to supply a little, enough, formal discipline to concentrate and refine language and emotion, and so produce more noticeable poetic results. A colleague has in the same way tried Beowulf verse but this, I think, is somewhat too technically difficult for any whole class and we are back where we were with *The Discipline of Metre*.

Briefly I approached parallelism by these steps:

1. First I read E. V. Lucas' 'Jack' to them (very free verse with lines of widely varying lengths). Then four or five of the boys read it, a line each. It was agreed that it was rather like a group of villagers discussing a character; each added a detail which seemed to echo its predecessor in sense and rhythm. This parallelism is, of course, emphasised in reading aloud.

2. Next, another half-dozen boys were persuaded to form a 'gossip circle' and to improvise such parallel lines on, perhaps, *The Tallest Man in the Village*. I generally start off with the keynote speech – 'As he strides with his long legs his head scrapes the stars'; the next boy (with any luck) continues 'As he strides down the street he looks down all the chimneys' and so on, a sort of incremental near-copying. The important thing here is to generate confidence and a ready spiel! What is fascinating is how rapidly the class are able to appreciate a good line and recognise a bad.¹

3. Have another look at the poem. What other means has the poet employed to achieve his vividness? Sound-and-sense words and imitative rhythm, both sound and rhythm mirroring the action.

4. Leave 'Jack' and turn to the O.T. Lamentations, chapter iii, 1-15. There are innumerable equally suitable passages – I chose this with my ultimate subject matter in mind. I read it. Then I read it antiphonally with a boy, splitting each verse at the colon. Why this way and not a verse each? Eventually everyone realised parallelism of sense and of rhythm, and examples were found.

¹ I have found the whole article most useful, including some of the illustrations from children's own work, but the method of oral composition suggested here has been a particularly valuable starting point for various experiments – including work for remedial classes!

5. Rhythm. I told them that certain rhythms or patterns sound 'right' and some didn't. We demonstrated this by taking a short verse and adding or subtracting a word, which always ruins decisively its rhythmic quality. The last thing wanted here, of course, is discussion of the how and the why. The whole aim is to produce untrammelled the natural rhythms of spoken English. (I use 'Jack' to show that parallelism is not necessarily 'solemn' and also so that the near-obsessive biblical cadence does not swamp the children's own speech rhythms. But I find that it frequently does.)

6. At this point I announce 'Now you are going to write some poetry like this', and we carry out a rapid recapitulation of all the ingredients they are to use, as they think fit.

From the O.T. we have Parallelism of Rhythm; Parallelism of Sense; Straight, word for word, repetition.

Here we usually make up a few complete verses, orally, of course. Pen is not set to paper during the lesson. I say the first half of a verse and they complete it and vice versa. I am supplied generally with the most gross elegant variation – 'The heavens pour down their floods upon men: the waters of above are emptied on us etc'. But this is no time for economy of utterance: precision, vividness but not restraint.

Then from 'Jack' we have Sound-and-Sense words; Lines of widely varying lengths. (This last is important if variety of tone and treatment is to be achieved.)

7. Lastly, give a choice of titles. For this first attempt I suggested topics connected with the Norsemen, the current part of their History syllabus. Some of the results follow this paragraph. In conclusion I would insist that this kind of verse-writing, via rhetoric, has shown itself a most productive exercise for the whole class and a supremely effective way of introducing the gifted few to the huge demands of poetry.

J. T. Evans, 'The Teaching of Verse-Writing in Class', in *The Use of English*, Winter, 1958, Vol. X, No. 2, Chatto and Windus.

In addition to the virtues attributed – quite rightly – to it by Mr Evans, this method seemed to me to offer advantages applicable not merely to the writing and comprehension of poetry by relatively gifted children, but to the improvement of prose writing by children over a fairly wide ability range. This impression has been constantly borne out by subsequent experience. The application of this technique to any type of narrative, moreover, even where the child has used it as a mechanical rule of thumb, has tended to improve the density and flexibility of the writing.

The following series of short examples was the first work along these lines by second-year children of average grammar school ability. In themselves, the examples are moderately inept, but I quote them because they were first attempts and because they were written after only minimal introductory explanation, followed by antiphonal reading of two extracts from psalms. The first is the least successful but

illustrates the trick of reversing the sentence order, though it has been applied too mechanically. Nevertheless, a start has been made, and one would expect the child to attempt to use more synonyms the next time. The other examples are considerably more interesting.

1. My house is burning to ashes,
 To ashes my house is burning,
 The pretty, fragile muslin curtains turn to shreds,
 To shreds the pretty, fragile muslin curtains turn.
As it burns pangs of an undescribable homelessness rush
 through your mind,
Pangs of an undescribable homelessness rush through your
 mind as it burns . . .

2. The devil stricken flames swept over us like birds.
 To the trees the blaze rose high above our heads.
 We ran in fear of the heat.
 In haste I hurried away from the fire.
 The mighty trees fell over our bodies.
 The tall undergrowth lit by flames licked our skin.

Once undergrowth, now just ash,
The foliage has been burnt to cinders.
We grieve over our lost ones,
The dead are mourned over.
No longer shall we live a happy life.
No longer shall we see a smiling face.

3. An inferno of fury raced across the forest land,
Flames spread across unshowered ground.
Crying and squealing, shouting, howling filled the air.
Cries of anguish mingled with the crackling of the flames.
I looked, I cried my hut was on fire, my family killed.
My eyes filled with tears, I looked away,
 my home and heart were burning.
All was lost,
 Everything gone.

4. The intensive heat radiated around me,
 A high wall of heat forced me backwards,
 My whole house was crumpling bit by bit,
 The stone structure seemed to fade away,
 The roaring flames rose high into the sky,
 In the sky red and yellow flames were collecting.

My heart was filled with sorrow,
Grief seized my thoughtful mind,
My dark eyes began to water,
Moisture soaked through my skin,
My mouth and nose were drying up,
The smoke curled past my face.

5. Fast and furious came the fire
 Raging swiftly, and angry fire god.
 Rushing along like waves on the sea,
 Curling, uncurling, rolling, unrolling.

One person –

'Ah, it came on us like a torrent,
 A waterfall encased in foam,
 Rearing over we,
 Running after we,
 Laughing at our plight
 Chuckling at our fatigue –
 How can we live in this pitiful way?'

Another person¹ –

'We are hungry, homeless, and weary.
 We raced from the fire for days.
 May he perish that took our little ones
 Our little ones thought it was a toy.'

These efforts, relatively crude though they are, may nevertheless serve to show how readily children take to the technique outlined by Mr Evans. This applies not only to the writing of short lyrical pieces such as laments or battle-songs, however, but also to the composition of longer narrative episodes of various kinds. In attempting this kind of work the teacher needs to ensure that the children have been 'warmed up' by thorough oral preparation round the class (in the way that Mr Evans suggests in paragraph 2). If he hopes to maintain the same kind of intensity as is found in the shorter pieces, he will also have to emphasise the need to break the narrative up into simple stages. In this way, the foundation for later, more explicit, work on mood and structure is being laid.

The extracts which follow were based on a grossly simplified – 'garbled' might be a better word – version of part of the Beowulf story. It seemed to me that a subject of a legendary and heroic type might encourage the children to give their vivid imaginations free rein.² A secondary reason was the opportunity offered for a follow-up reading from the original, where the narrative method seems closely akin to what the children are themselves attempting in their step-by-step development and expansion of each main idea.³

¹ The division into two speakers was her own idea, suggested no doubt by the antiphonal reading in the preparatory stage.

² I would emphasise, however, that the technique may just as easily be applied to writing up 'A Street Accident' or 'A Fire at the Factory' – i.e. something thoroughly modern and realistic.

³ See, for example, the description of Grendel's great shriek of despair:

'A din arose, strange and mighty; a horrible fear came to the North-Danes, to everyone who heard the shrieking from the wall, – heard the adversary of God chant his grisly lay, his song of defeat, – the prisoner of hell wailing over his wound.' (Lines 784–9, in the translation by John Clark Hall, published by Allen and Unwin.)

In the preparatory oral work, before the children¹ wrote their own individual versions, the story was broken up into stages of which only the first two need concern us:

1. The scene outside
2. Beowulf's preparations

The idea of atmosphere was introduced, as unobtrusively as possible at this stage, by giving them a suitably evocative opening sentence – 'Soon all was dark and quiet'. For the second stage no theme sentence was given, but stress was laid upon the description of the details of the armour.

The first two verse passages were written by girls, the rest – in prose – by boys. This preference is a fairly common one, but there are generally some striking exceptions – the important thing at this stage is to leave it to the individual to decide which he prefers.

1. Darkness crept upon the small village.

Silently the velvety blackness crept around the village.

The stars glittered like jewels in the midnight sky,

Small pinpoint of light from the stars shone through the blackness.

Beowulf a man of great stature prepared himself for battle with Grendel.

Grendel a terrible and ferocious monster was the target of Beowulf a man of great stature.

He polished his great sword, the bejewelled hilt glittering in the candlelight.

His great sword glittered with jewels like a million stars as he polished it in the moonlight.

The bronze breast plate glowed like a huge fire as the rays of the candlelight struck it.

As the rays of the candlelight struck it, his breastplate glowed with a deep fire.

By now the moon had risen casting shadows over the now silent village.

The silent village was covered with shadows as the moon rose.

Beowulf blew out the candle for its light was no longer needed.

The moon gave enough light so the candle was no longer needed.

Carefully he strapped on the leg shields and breast plate.

His armour was carefully strapped on glowing in the moonlight.

His plumed helmet waved majestically as he placed it upon his head.

He placed his majestically plumed helmet on his head.

He gripped his huge sword and slid it into his scabbard encrusted with many jewels . . .

2. The night hung heavy over the deserted village,

The desolated village was weighted down by the enormous sky.

There was one solitary light on in Beowulf's House,

The light was low and dim it shone only on the great Beowulf.

He was sitting on a magnificent seat fit for a king

Beowulf was to his people a king and he sat upon his throne.

His hands were wrapped emotionally around a great jewelled sword,

His jewelled sword he clasped warmly to his heart.

¹ The same class as before.

The armour encased his huge muscular, manly body,
 The armour was shining, his broad back held it well.
 His mountainous boots were brightly clad with eastern jewels.
 His jewels were generously spread out on his gigantic boots.
 As he stood up there were bright flashes from his armour,
 The flashes came from the reflecting light.
 In all his splendour his heart throbbed fiercely,
 His madness grew greater with every passing minute.
 He knew he looked greatly magnificent.
 This would frighten the apley Grendel.
 He thought for one moment about his dead kin-folk
 His kin folk set out just like he did.
 They ended up in the burial ground.
 He knew they depended on him to take revenge.
 He started out with courage in heart and faith in God
 The God of all would defend him and his people.
 He cut his way into a clearing,
 The clearing was engulfed in a thicket.
 There at the end was a cave perhaps Grendels,
 Could this be Grendel's cave at the far end? . . .

I do not wish to comment in detail upon these, nor upon those which follow. There is some clumsy expression and some purely mechanical inversion, I know, but the important thing is that ideas are not just introduced and then discarded, as so often happens in the narrative writing of children of this age. Not only this, but the opening sections of all the examples show some feeling for atmosphere and in the best of them the evocation is very competently sustained. Of the next four extracts, two consist of the opening paragraphs only, the first showing a boy of average ability making a conscientious effort to reproduce the style shown, while the second has greater flexibility and good control of atmosphere. The third example – a sound effort, with some effective parallelism – gives the first two sections in full, as does the fourth which, though it lacks any very obvious parallelism, has a remarkably well sustained opening and shows also some deliberate use of alliteration – remembered from a previous lesson.

1. The sun sank beneath the black hills. The darkness came down and devoured the land. The land disappeared as the cloud of blackness descended. Beowulf cleaned his massive and mighty sword in the moonlight. The silvery sword glisend as he hurriedly polished it. His helmet studded with diamonds twinkled faintly in the poor light. The poor light made the helmet stand out in the dark atmosphere . . .
2. The moon rose high in the night sky and darkness crept stealthily over the stillness of the night. As it gradually grew darker the hut on the hillside seemed to fade away. It was pitch black now and everything seemed to be grasping at one another in the silent stillness of the evil night. . . .

3. The night was still and cold and silent. Peace ruled the surrounding countryside. Tall mountains were silhouetted against the skyline. Dark shapes loomed up from out of nowhere in the end turning out to be trees. The moon shone dimly between the clouds. Peeping from behind the clouds the moon shone dimly. Inside his manor house Beowulf drew his mighty sword from its jewel studded scabbard. Beowulf cleaned his famous sword with loving care by the flickering candlelight. He handled his great sword with skill and ease and then returned it to his glittering scabbard. He then put on his gold helmet. Every piece of his armour glittered and shined in the candlelight. Every last little buckle or strap shone with pride of belonging to such a great man.

Ready at last to fight Grendel, Beowulf went outside in the cool, clear, fresh air of the night. A few stars spread out along the sky at intervals twinkled so that Beowulf could pick his way to the cave where the monster lived. The moon had by now completely disappeared and so just leaving the stars to accompany Beowulf. Jumping over obstacles that were in his path, Beowulf made good time and soon the cave of the monster was in sight. Walking more slowly and deliberately Beowulf cautiously approached the mouth of the cave. He drew his trusty sword and waited. . . .

4. The dark drab night settled in. Trees were silhouetted against the dark grey sky. Shadows lengthened out to nothing as the sky turned velvet black. The distant mountains projected against the moon as it started its slow climb. The snow shone a dirty grey in the full bright moonlight. The trees were a deep dark green as the moon rose high in the grey cloud-patched sky. The light green grass rippled softly in the cool soft wind, it seemed to whisper to itself in a rhythmic tune. The last few birds settled in for the night. All became quiet and still.

In a cold, candlelit cave Beowulf gave his huge he-man helmet its last shine and polish he placed it on the stone table. It glittered in the candlelight, the jewel embedded in it glinted as the breeze flickered it. The fur tassel on top waved and rippled softly. He picked up his armour with one enormous hand. Thumping it down on the stone he began polishing and scouring. He scraped the old dirt and black dried blood from previous fights. Polishing the breastplate his mighty muscles bulged because of scratches and deep dirty marks made by enemies of triumphant fights . . .

In such narrative and descriptive work as that just quoted, the technique of parallelism can be seen paving the way for later more exacting work on descriptive technique, as described in Chapter 2. It is worth mentioning also, that the same technique can be used in the deliberate development of evocative key sentences¹ and of the gambits 'How I love . . .' and 'How I hate'. Though I have already illustrated the latter² it seems worth while to look at some more examples, the first two of which were written shortly after the other work on 'Beowulf'. I quote them because they show the way in which the technique has helped the writers to sustain their themes. This will be much more obvious in the first example, where the technique has been applied fairly rigidly. In

¹ The kind mentioned in Chapter 2, p. 59.

² See p. 66.

the second there is in fact no obvious parallelism, but there is a density of texture of which the writer would have been incapable some months before.

1.

I hate latin
Latin brings no joy to me.
Flies buzzing angrily around our heads,
We sit, trying to concentrate on Latin.
Outside this dismal room everyone's having fun
Playing netball, hockey or tennis,
While I sit here and slave away,
Sun glaring smirking through
Blindless windows
Rays beating a tatoo on my scorched forehead.

2.

Filthy, muddy unwashed windows met my gaze as I looked out of the bus. An uncomfortable seat was under me, dusty and choking, sending clouds of dry fine dust up as I move uncomfortably. Dirt fell off the mazy windows choking me as the hot stifling sunrays pounded unmercifully through the window. Thick, black, choking smoke blew in my face smarting my eyes and covering my teeth and clogging up my ears. I watched people in open sports cars whizz by, the wind blowing in their faces and pushing back their hair. How I envied people as they walk by with open shirsts and cool ices. Cold ice-cream adverts pasted me as I rode along in an everlasting agony.

This may not be the kind of thing one would find in anthologies of children's writing, but in a sense this makes it more worthy of quotation in this context. It represents the level of honest endeavour, of interested and conscious experimentation, which we must try to maintain. While I have insisted that the position of the imaginative work described in the first four chapters is central, I have also suggested that total concentration of this kind cannot be demanded too often, or for too long. Imaginatively gifted children will generally produce good work from time to time; in order to make their performance in this field more consistent, some sort of scheme as that outlined is necessary, but there is at the same time a need for their control of language to be gradually extended by as wide a variety of comprehensible and stimulating challenges as the teacher can provide. If I appear to have dealt at disproportionate length with parallelism, it is because I rank it high amongst the various techniques which offer a real support to a child's own inventive capacity, and which increase both the sensitiveness and the flexibility of his expression.

If parallelism is one way of helping young writers towards a more conscious control of mood, so too are pictures. These may link up very conveniently with some of the elementary work on the development of evocative key sentences, as well as providing material for more technical discussion of the kind glanced at in Chapter 2. I have suggested

that much of the uncertainty in children's writing springs from the lack of a shaping viewpoint¹ that would give coherence and unity to the whole. As soon as one asks the child to develop a key sentence that is not his own, one imposes an external factor which virtually ensures that his treatment will not be really individual, and which is unlikely to leave scope for any total imaginative involvement. Nevertheless, the technique of thematic development is one that he needs to learn, in order to be able to do justice to his own ideas later on. The artless insight and concentration of the pre-adolescent stage cannot be prolonged, but the increased technical awareness may help the adolescent to find adequate expression and to organise satisfactorily a different, more conscious kind of writing, which is the expression of his new and more complex personality perceiving and recording in a correspondingly more complex way. In a sense it seems that there is something of a photographic capacity evident in the writing of the able eleven- or twelve-year-old, whereas effective writing by an adolescent or an adult is much more akin to the painter's art.

All the more reason, then, to turn to pictures at this stage. The great advantage here is that, although the shaping viewpoint is not the child's own, he has a greater chance of really sharing it – and consequently becoming personally involved – than if the teacher merely asks him to develop an alien idea. In this work his technique will be improved and his general sensitivity should also be extended. His response will depend upon the choice of the picture (and also, I think, on practice) but we shall hope to find a developing capacity for projection into the scene the painter has presented. In the examples below we see, firstly, three examples of a relatively superficial response (to a relatively superficial picture) but one which shows the children at least achieving a unity of atmospheric effect comparable to that in the original.

1. The sea rolled up to the beach, it was calm and the sea could not even be bothered to roar or make much movement at all. The fishing nets lolled lazily in the late afternoon sun. Everything was lazy nothing or person could be bothered to work themselves too much. Even the fishermen lazily sat or leaned as they slowly pulled in the nets from the calm sea. The whole scene was peaceful.
2. The peaceful docks lay basking in the sun. Everyone was quiet as the sun began to sink in the western sky. The water slowly rippled as the fish surfaced to warm their faces. Occasionally a plop was heard from one of the creatures of the water. The white nets draped on a line were drying. They drooped under the heavy strain.

¹ What I believe in journalese would be called an 'angle' or a 'slant'. Crude though it may be, the expression is an interesting variation of the more literary visual metaphor.

3. The waves roll softly around the fishing boats as the men lazily haul the nets in. The afternoon sun makes even the dulllest colour spring to life and take on a new glow. Fishing nets hang droopily on rods as if the heat is too much for them and they feel faint. The boats rock gently on the still water broken only by small ripples. The mountains on the other side of the water look misty as the sun makes a haze fall over them.

In these passages, by second-year children of grammar school ability, we are once again seeing work that demonstrates the level of 'honest endeavour' to which I referred earlier. It is quite likely, however, that pictures used in this way will also from time to time stimulate writing which rises above a sound technical competence. In such cases the technical command of mood will generally be invigorated by a new depth of imaginative comprehension. It is advisable, in all this work, to stress that we are writing about a *scene*, rather than a *picture*, in order to encourage the children to 'participate' or to project themselves. At the level of honest endeavour the projection is very incomplete and the writing tends to describe only what is there. At the higher level, where the picture has really made some impact, the original details may be subtly transformed by the esemplastic power of the child's own imagination. Such a response, to similar war pictures, is shown in two extracts which follow. The first was written by a somewhat disturbed eleven-year-old boy of approximately secondary modern A-stream ability, the second by an intelligent and sensitive girl, aged fourteen.

The Dawn

The moon played on the bars, my thoughts wandered to my long-awaited death. Cold the night air as I tried to sleep, though I tried in vain. The guards mocking laughter sent all thoughts to my death. The morning came my death came too. The wind cold against my cheeks as I walked to the bullet-riddled wall. Blindfolded, the order given to the squad to fire. As I bled to death my thoughts wandered to the country of my birth.

A Lonely Soldier

Heavy hearted and with eyes full of unshed tears he stands staring across the stagnant battlefield. He is a dishevelled figure in a mud-splattered uniform, his stout boots bathing in pools of blood. His tin helmet hangs limply from a clenched fist, his rifle, now motionless, lies smoking in the mud. The stench of dead flesh plays cruelly about his nostrils.

Nothing moves, the treacherous battle is ended. Enemy and comrade lie together in crumpled heaps, rotting away in graves of blood. No longer do rifle shots pierce the air. The tongue of ammunition no longer chatters from the mouth of the machine gun. He out of five thousand has been snatched from the jaws of death. He is lonely, so very lonely – a dying spark among the ashes.

These demonstrate, once again, that various methods (at a variety of levels) may lead to the same result. Here the mood, rather than the

details of the picture, has been the starting point, and the imaginative comprehension of the original has been complete enough to ensure a depth of participation which gives convincing unity to the passages. The grasp of mood, the possession of the needed shaping viewpoint, has in turn ensured that the language and imagery are suitably harsh and concrete.¹

★

The reader will have noticed that my preoccupation – even when dealing with ‘technical tricks’ – has been with work of an imaginative type. He may feel, therefore, that while the topic of *sensitivity* has been covered, *sense* – writing of the more humdrum, down-to-earth variety – has been ignored. If such writing is required at fifth-year examination level, as well as in the kind of factual communication needed in a host of day-to-day situations, this omission may seem to him surprising – even culpable. If he looks at most textbooks he will be reinforced in this impression, for he will find there a vast range of material devoted to the planning of essays, to the structure and linking of paragraphs, to the techniques of introduction and conclusion, and so on.² Before I attempt partially to remedy this omission, I should perhaps suggest one or two reasons why these topics are not more thoroughly dealt with here.

In the first place, I would contend that much of the material thus presented is irrelevant in the context of the work in the first four years of the secondary school. Quite apart from the fact that the worst of these textbooks seem to aim at re-establishing an effete tradition of belles-lettres, they make the assumption, not only that comprehension is best taught by doing comprehension tests, but also that the writing of explanatory, argumentative or discussion essays is best taught by writing either full-scale essays on these lines from the earliest years upwards or, if they make some concessions to age and ability, by writing explanatory, argumentative or discussion paragraphs. The tendency in all this, it seems to me, is to encourage children to put very elaborate frames round very incompetent pictures. Anyone who has marked G.C.E. Ordinary level language papers will have come across enough over-planned platitude, enough superbly arranged truisms, to be able to bear me out in this.

¹ An illustration of work on a poem and picture related to each other is given on p. 191.

² As George Sampson put it – ‘laboriously exercising the pupils in a difficult, artificial gesture, that can never form part of their normal, natural life.’ *English for the English*, Cambridge University Press, p. 70.

If a topic is not interesting and important, the subsequent exercise in ingenious word-spinning is not valuable enough to justify its being set at all. If it is important, then it is most unlikely that a child under the age of fourteen will be able to do any sort of justice to it. 'Practice makes perfect' is a thoroughly misleading aphorism in this context. Essays which involve the easy and logical manipulation of a wide range of ideas, as do those of the kinds alluded to, are simply not within the scope of most children of this age. The discussion essay can be usefully set, not after the children have filled a suitable number of notebooks with sketch plans and rough drafts, but after they have had wide, and constant, and vigorous oral practice. We demand 'a good range of ideas' and 'flexibility'. Unless our charges have previously, and for several years, participated in the give and take of class discussion, learning to appreciate other people's points of view, and to look at the subject from a variety of different angles, the whole exercise is meaningless. Instead of variety and flexibility, instead of an interestingly argued personal view, one finds stuff like this, the opening of an essay on the subject 'Fish' by a fourteen-year-old grammar school boy:

There are many kinds of fish, there are big fish and little fish. The big fish eat the little fish and the little fish eat plankton. Fish may be divided also into fresh water fish and salt water fish . . .

This is only an extreme example of a very common type of writing, in which a series of obvious statements are carefully organised under headings, or where the whole structure is based on a thinly disguised list of objects, types, advantages, disadvantages and so on. The argumentative essay is often equally badly done: one finds pupils arranging ideas into pros and cons and developing these so crudely that one half of the essay is in flat contradiction of the other. This kind of inflexibility springs directly from lack of experience of reasoned argument and debate in class. The purely expository essay - on such fascinating topics as 'Litter', 'Britain's Roads', or 'Bridges' - *can* be an interesting exercise if it comes after some project work,¹ involving both discussion and research, for then we may be reasonably confident that the writers have something to say.

There remains another kind of factual writing to be considered - the factual explanation of some task, or the description of some mechanical process. Since such exercises are now relatively common in public examinations, one must assume that there will be schools where time is wasted preparing for such tests, where from the earliest years onwards

¹ A topic in itself. See, for instance, *The English Subjects Synthesis*, by F. C. Happold, Christophers, London.

the child works his way through graded exercises: how to clean a pair of shoes, how to make a pot of tea, how to make a fish pond, or how to knit a pair of combinations. I have asserted elsewhere that the strength and vigour of children's writing is dependent upon motivation, and exercises of the type above seem worthy of dismissal from the English lesson on that ground alone. There is too much that is important for the English teacher to do for him to waste time.

Such exercises need not always be a waste of time, however, nor need they be unmotivated. I have not suggested that writing of a simple factual or explanatory kind should form no part of the children's education – merely that it is best left out of the English syllabus. One of the most interesting minor features of the Newsom Report is the repeated stress on the responsibility of teachers of subjects other than English for providing opportunity for writing and discussion. Thus some of the topics above might have real point in the context of work in the practical subjects, and the kind of writing obtained therein should be better than could be achieved in an English lesson because it would now be properly motivated. Again, partly because of the burden upon the English teacher, certain other kinds of factual account may best be treated in the science, history or geography lesson. Here, again, there may be an increased chance of properly motivated writing, and the children should have plenty of factual material to select and arrange. Conversely, if there is no possibility of co-operation between departments in this way, the English teacher might himself seriously consider setting topics connected with work in other subjects, so as to ensure that the pupils had a suitably extensive corpus of useful information to manipulate.

So far my argument may seem to have been purely negative. There are, however, some positive points to be made. In the first place, as may be inferred from what has already been said, the foundations of successful factual, explanatory and argumentative writing may be laid by establishing various kinds of discussion as a regular part of work in English from the first year upwards. The free and lively expression of personal opinion must be one feature of the 'climate of heightened awareness' it is our aim to create. This not only involves relatively formal class discussion and debate, but also some kind of critical response to, and oral preparation for, all the work I have outlined. The great advantage of project work in this context is that it involves consultation and co-operation between individual children, and between groups of children,¹ at first in the gathering and selection of basic

¹ As opposed to the more normal communication between teacher and child.

material and, later on, in the editing and presentation of the information collected.

Apart from such oral work, however, some technical instruction in the handling of ideas is desirable. While I would cheerfully jettison for at least three years nearly all the paraphernalia of formal essay planning, there is one aspect I would retain – the key, topic or theme sentence. This concept seems to me fundamental to clear communication. All our pupils who aspire to any significant standard of literacy need to learn the difference between major statement and illustration; they must also be able to distinguish between a *heading* – which roughly indicates the limits of the topic to be treated – and a *theme* – which expresses in a condensed form the pith of the writer's opinion, and which reminds him of the direction his argument must take. Pupils must discover the extent to which any vigorous expression of personal views – or indeed any really clear explanation – depends on the muscularity and directness of the key sentences. Having found that opening statements of the kind quoted ('There are many kinds of fish . . .') lead inevitably to a tedious list, they may learn to avoid any such sterile gambits. If there is sufficient opportunity for discussion and criticism of each other's efforts, both written and oral, the basic criteria of judgment¹ become rapidly meaningful to them. If it is true that facts 'speak for themselves', it is also true that their significance is often highly ambiguous: thus pupils need practice in using facts as evidence to support an argument.² With the more able, it should be possible to practice using the same set of facts to support conflicting interpretations. Here there is an obvious link with work on newspapers and on subjective and objective writing.³ A useful parallel may also be drawn between the use of facts in supporting an argument, and what I have called 'significant detail' in descriptive writing:⁴ significance of the fact, or detail, is not an inherent quality but is to be deduced from the use to which it is put, the context in which it occurs, and the measure in which it contributes to the writer's achieving a particular aim, whether this be the evocation of a mood or scene, or the presentation of a compelling argument.

Such work is a logical extension of earlier work on narrative and description in which the children learnt about key sentences of a simpler type and developed some skill in elaborating important ideas. Because

¹ For example: 'cogent', 'clear', 'personal', 'interesting'; as opposed to 'flabby', 'obscure', 'over-generalised', and 'obvious'.

² I have found the analogy of the courtroom helpful in this context.

³ See Chapter 9, pp. 203–6.

⁴ Chapter 2, p. 57 ff.

this latest aspect of key sentences involves a higher degree of abstraction and calls for greater intellectual maturity, it seems to me to be inappropriate to any but really able children below the fourth year. A start may perhaps be made somewhat earlier if the approach is once again through oral work, however. Thus a theme may be developed by contributions from various members of the class – I have found ‘oral paragraphing’ along these lines to be a helpful refresher exercise with even O level candidates; in this context, a tape-recorder enables the relationship between the ideas to be examined in a more critical way than need be attempted earlier, though the younger children soon get an inkling of what is meant by ‘irrelevance’ and ‘illogical connection’. Such experience in class is, above all, an economical way of learning to distinguish between ideas in terms of their relative ‘developability’. Much the same skills are practised by the giving of short talks for which the speaker is only allowed to work from five or six key themes written on a slip of paper. Quite apart from the value of short talks in the context of oral work, this exercise teaches the pupil to think ahead, to see the subject as a whole, and to note – in advance – potential links between different aspects of the main topic.

Work of this kind on paragraphing can easily become an arid and unmotivated intellectual exercise. It is for this reason that I would leave it until relatively late in the course, when children have learnt to enjoy expressing themselves in a variety of ways and have begun to attain a certain maturity as well as a useful body of knowledge and experience. It is, moreover, at this stage – when they have reached fourteen or fifteen – that the idea of the writer’s obligation to the reader¹ becomes most meaningful, so that the need for clarity now motivates their efforts to improve.

¹Particularly when they begin to think of the reader as an examiner!

8 – Reading and Comprehension

The reading of literature is a kind of creative reception. It is almost sacramental. In the ordinary use of the words, literature cannot be taught. . . .

The true teacher does not teach, but transmit. . . . There is a well-founded tradition . . . that an old elementary headmaster, examining a class in *The Merchant of Venice*, and encountering the line 'Came you from Padua, from Bellario?' called for a map and insisted that the boys should point out the position of Padua, and then the position of Bellario . . . No wonder children left school without regret, and shuddered ever after at the mention of poetry. It is still possible to use the present tense in that sentence.

If literature in schools is not a delight, if it is not, in all senses, a 're-creation', an experience in creative reception, it is a failure. . . .

George Sampson, *English for the English*¹

In the specialised vocabulary of any branch of knowledge there will tend to be a few words that the expert uses with some reluctance. This is particularly so today, with the wide currency of scientific terms in the popular press, as a result of which one continually finds once-respectable words rendered suspect by the accretion of irrelevant associations and overtones. Often such changes are so gradual that the mutation is insufficiently conspicuous for one to be aware of what is happening. Something like this has happened to the word 'literature', which is now a thoroughly 'loaded' term, fraught with various value-overtones and underpropped by associations with the 'classics' and with nineteenth-century aesthetic and cultural theory.

The exact nature of the changing connotations of the word would be a subject in itself and need not concern us here, but there is one feature of its use in the context of secondary education that calls for comment. This is its investiture with a capital 'L'. Whatever the criteria determining the limits of this category, there has been – and still is – a widespread acceptance of the rôle of literature as evocative of 'sweetness and light'. It would be ridiculous to deny that Matthew Arnold's thoughts on culture have had important and valuable effects, but this is not the whole picture. The practical consequences of the introduction into the classroom of such an evangel have been less obvious, but positively harmful. Above all, I would point to the condescension

¹ Cambridge University Press, 1921, pp. 89–90.

implicit in any view of literature as a corrective or 'civilising' influence to which others are to be exposed.

The reader may feel that I am exaggerating the extent to which nineteenth-century attitudes to culture and literature persist today. The fact remains, however, that some educators still find it possible to reconcile the resort to Literature (rather like cascara, or castor oil) as good for the child, with a ready lip-service to a child-centred education. Such an approach *de haut en bas* seems incompatible with the development of individual awareness, however, or with the establishment of any habit of active response. Just as children find it hard to believe that anything as horrible as cascara can be good,¹ so they find it hard to see meaning or relevance in the unappetising texts placed before them. If they do not actively rebel, neither do they actively accept; where the teacher is still naïvely regarded as one who 'must know' and whose judgments therefore compel respect, the pupils may absorb Keats and Wordsworth sufficiently well for the teacher to be deluded into thinking he has educated them. Yet in a sense there is no difference in kind between the final condition of the pupils who in these lessons have gone to sleep, literally, and that of those who – having passively accepted what was put before them – have merely gone to sleep, critically.

There is, then, a real need for those who profess to put the child first to see just how radical a change of approach this implies. It means, firstly, abrogating all preaching and *ex cathedra* pronouncements. It means, secondly, selecting material with little reference to any absolute aesthetic standard but with the closest attention to the child's own interests and capacity.² This is not to deny that our task, being to whet the appetite, involves extending the child's interests and abilities. Such an extension can, however, only be achieved if it starts from where the child is at a particular stage; this is, of course, merely rephrasing an earlier point – we work from his actual liking for fish and chips towards something which requires a more refined palate, and we aim, throughout this process, to maintain and extend his positive enjoyment.

Those whose teaching stress is on 'great literature' may differ in their interpretations, but are likely to resemble each other in the way this preoccupation leads to their losing touch with the individual child.

¹ They may, however, on the basis of their experience, go on to infer that what is 'good' is inevitably uncongenial. They will allow the teacher his mastery in his own field and will never be tempted to trespass on it.

² 'Through him [the teacher] the selection of the effective world reaches the pupil. He fails the recipient when he presents this selection to him with a gesture of interference. It must be concentrated in him; and doing out of concentration has the appearance of rest. Interference divides the soul in his care into an obedient part and a rebellious part. But a hidden influence proceeding from his integrity has an integrating force.' Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Fontana Edition, p. 117.

I have often felt that such teachers would find it profitable to observe some of the work done in schools for educationally subnormal children. They might see, for example, a handicraft teacher who spent his spare time trying to devise practical tasks leading to simple but pleasing end-products. They would observe his ruthless rejection of anything that involved mechanical or manipulatory skills beyond the pupils' capabilities. In other words, they would be witnessing the translation into practice of a vitally important educational principle – the constant adjustment of challenge to the capacity of the child so as to put him in a situation where he may achieve success. Obviously, pupils at this type of school are children who have had so much experience of failure and general inadequacy that their need for success is exceptionally urgent. The difference between their needs and those of children of average ability is not, however, one of kind but merely of degree. Indeed the consistent application of this principle at all levels of education would have results little short of the miraculous; at the moment, our pre-occupation with competitive situations is still total enough to justify the charge that we are educating for failure.¹

I have asserted earlier that there need be no dichotomy between the interests of the child and those of the subject, and this holds as true, it seems to me, in the field of books as in that of creative writing. An approach to English 'through literature' is not only compatible with a child-centred education, it is an indispensable part of it – provided that the initial emphasis and criteria derive from the teacher's appreciation of the child.²

¹ A simple example of this is selection for university entrance. Edmond Holme's eloquent denunciation of education by reward and punishment, *op. cit.*, pp. 59–79 especially, is still relevant. See also Michael Young's *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, Penguin Books.

The significance of this issue is well suggested by James Hemming in 'Some Aspects of Moral Development in a Changing Society', in *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, June 1957:

'Schools offer children clearly defined goals of striving; they are accordingly in a position to build or undermine the children's self-respect by the way achievement is dispersed among the pupils. Many delinquents have a record of persistent failure at school. Although no research on the influence of school failure upon delinquency, based on scientific comparisons between groups of schools, has so far been completed, we may assume that the success/failure experience of the child at school has repercussions upon his moral development. A child assured of "success in proportion to effort" at school is likely to strive successfully and, so, to maintain his self-respect.'

² To the humane, enlightened and ingenuous reader who feels that I am labouring this point I would suggest that wide areas of education remain impervious to such enlightenment; that indecent atrocities are committed daily under the cloak of literature teaching, particularly in the teaching of *able* children; that the detailed study of a Shakespearian text is quite often the only drama undertaken with eleven-year-old children; that all the texts available for use in class are in some schools totally out-dated, outworn, and out of touch; that some second-year children still study Milton. And still people are surprised that some pupils find the transition from junior to secondary school very disturbing, people who would rebel if they were required to fill in their income-tax forms in Greek.

Where this condition is met¹ the impact of the imaginative experience of literature may be enormous. In the first place, the teacher should remember how widespread is the notion that man is a rational animal and how common the resultant assumption that people's behaviour is to a considerable extent determined by rational processes. I have suggested already that, in fact, most children are inept and uncomfortable in their use of abstractions and general principles. Some may be totally incapable of arguing logically from general principle to particular application. Thus it seems to me by no means accidental that Christ taught in parables, from which we learn in the same way as from literature. The great teaching strength of both modes lies precisely in their concreteness and particularity. In a rather similar way psychiatrists and social workers, faced with a need to say something which is rather difficult to render palatable to the hearer, approach the subject obliquely, using a 'case-history approach' and talking about somebody else – a Mister X. Literature is full of people rather like this, who are *not us* and whom we therefore have a chance to think about more objectively. Though they are not us, however, they may be like us, and this may be immensely reassuring.

In so far as it provides opportunity for objective thinking about human affairs and personal relationships, then, literature has an educational rôle of obvious importance. With somewhat older children of good ability it may be possible to discuss this explicitly, linking it with more specific work on emotive words and bias in newspapers², both of which serve to emphasise how difficult it is to consider human relationships in as detached a way as one regards the outcome of, say, a chemical experiment.

Where children respond really imaginatively to literature, however,

¹ The subtle relationship between teacher and child is nowhere more stimulatingly described than in the chapter on 'Education' in the work by Buber to which I have already referred and to which I shall refer again. The reader is urged to read the original himself, but the following passage, dealing with the 'greatness' of the modern educator, so brilliantly emphasises what I take to be the essential attitude that I make no apology for quoting it at length:

'He enters the school-room for the first time, he sees them crouching at the desks, indiscriminately flung together. . . . the glance of the educator accepts and receives them all. . . .

'If this educator should ever believe that for the sake of education he has to practise selection and arrangement, then he will be guided by another criterion than that of inclination; he will be guided by the recognition of values which is in his glance as an educator. But even then his selection remains suspended, under constant correction by the special humility of the educator for whom the life and particular being of all his pupils is the decisive factor to which his "hierarchic" recognition is subordinated. For in the manifold variety of the children, the variety of creation is placed before him.'

M. Buber, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–2.

² See also Chapter 9, p. 205, on this point.

it may well be argued that there will be little real objectivity. This is of course true; in fact, we are seeking to promote projection and identification and if we succeed in the enlargement of sympathy in this way, the child's capacity for objective judgment may be in inverse proportion to the extent of his imaginative involvement. Here again, we rediscover the need for the teacher's attention to be focused on the child.¹ Occasionally he will note that a child grows surprisingly heated in his discussion of some part of a story, and he will surmise that there is an emotional involvement and identification here which demand that he guide the discussion with tact and sympathy. The number of occasions when the involvement is as deeply personal as this will be limited, however, and it remains true to say that the discussion of a third person, even though he may resemble you or me, and even though his situation may in some respects be similar to ours, will permit children and particularly adolescents to discuss matters of deep concern with the minimum of embarrassment. I would go further – in some cases this may be the only means of touching on such matters.

Where this is so, it must be obvious that there has at least been a proper attention to the child's age and interests in the selection of the books; otherwise the literature would not have seemed as meaningful and deeply relevant. The necessity of such an orientation lies simply in the fact that we are demanding, above all, a positive response – active, *creative* reading and not passive assimilation of printed matter. It must not be assumed, however, that our selection of literature on such a basis will involve using only modern novels with modern children, or using only childish books with those who are immature. There are many aspects of their own experience which they are not particularly aware of and which it is our duty to bring to the surface. Sometimes a topical event may provide just what we need as a 'lead-in'. For example, an account of racial troubles in the United States or, better, in their own area, may enable us to introduce them to Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, or Braithwaite's *To Sir with Love*. A television programme on handicapped children may suggest a reading from Helen Keller's autobiography. The important thing is that they should see literature as relevant, if not specifically to them, at least to the world they live in.

The teacher who has his finger on the pulse of the class should be able

¹ Once again, cf. Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 128: 'Without the action of his spirit being in any way weakened he must at the same time be over there, on the surface of that other spirit which is being acted upon. . . . It is not enough for him to imagine the child's individuality, nor to experience him directly as a spiritual person and then to acknowledge him. Only when he catches himself "from over there", and feels how it affects one, how it affects this other human being, does he recognize the real limit. . . .'

to recognise the outward physical signs that often indicate when the response is a really active one. I am not thinking of the goody-goody who has to tell the teacher that 'this is super!' but of the others who are too absorbed to say anything, so that the heightened tension in the classroom is an almost tangible thing. Such a teacher will know by the set of the head and the elbows, by the hands cupped over the ears – purposively excluding distraction and irrelevance – that he may now leave them to it. Most of all he will note that most significant symptom – the half-surprised smile of recognition.

What this last indicates is admirably suggested by William Empson:

As I understand it, there is always in great poetry a feeling of generalisation from a case which has been presented definitely; there is always an appeal to a background of human experience which is all the more present when it cannot be named. I do not have to deny that the narrower chisel may cut more deeply into the heart. What I would suppose is that, whenever a receiver of poetry is seriously moved by an apparently simple line, what are moving in him are the traces of a great part of his past experience and of the structure of his past judgments.¹

Here Empson is speaking of great poetry, and certainly the condensation and heightened suggestiveness of much great poetry is most likely to produce this kind of response. It is not attendant only upon great poetry, but also on poetry and prose that we might call good rather than great. Children's imaginative reading becomes really absorbed and active as soon as they have half-recognised some personal analogy.² When one sees first- and second-year children reading, for example, *The Boy Who Was Afraid* by Armstrong Sperry,³ C. Day Lewis' *The Otterbury Incident*, *The Family from One End Street* by E. Garnett, or *Emil and the Detectives* by Erich Kästner, one sees transiently reflected on their faces 'traces of a great part of (their) past experience' in a way that is not different in kind from the reaction of an adult moved by a simple line of poetry.

The teacher should be hypersensitive to the children's reactions. He

¹ William Empson: *The Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. xv of the preface to the 2nd Edition, Peregrine Books, 1961.

² I shall be considering later the place of continuous writing in comprehension work, but it is perhaps worth quoting two extracts to illustrate a response to a poem through the perception of personal analogy. I have already quoted work by able children based on Miss E. J. Scovell's poem, 'Boy Fishing'; here are two more passages, this time written by second-year children in the ninth set of a comprehensive school intake of twelve forms.

1. I am reading silently in a library with very few people in it. It is very hot and I open my top button. Then as I carry on reading it becomes very exciting then I go tensed. The noise fades away as I read on. Then there is no noise at all.

2. I am lost in a world of my own, as I make my way down a twisting, and, very narrow lane. Tick, tick, tick, my mileometre goes, so bringing me back from last world. A branch bows down and tap me on the shoulder, I jump into a statue like poise, but then relax.

³ The Bodley Head, 1942.

needs to be able to cater for moods and attitudes characteristic of their age – thus at some time their new, adolescents' vision of their parents may be rendered less painful by reading about a similar experience. At other times the mood may be more fleeting. Adolescents sometimes need something harsh, some shock treatment, particularly if they are parading their toughness and cynicism. The following poem by Michael Baldwin springs to mind as a possible one to use in such a situation:

DEATH ON A LIVE WIRE

Treading a field I saw afar
A laughing fellow climbing the cage
That held the grinning tensions of wire,
Alone, and no girl gave him courage.
Up he climbed on the diamond struts,
Diamond cut diamond, till he stood
With the insulators brooding like owls
And all their live wisdom, if he would.
I called to him climbing and asked him to say
What thrust him into the singeing sky:
The one word he told me the wind took away,
So I shouted again, but the wind passed me by
And the gust of his answer tore at his coat
And stuck him stark on the lightning's bough;
Humanity screeched in his manacled throat
And he cracked with flame like a figure of straw
Turning, burning, he dangled black,
A hot sun swallowing at his fork
And shaking embers out of his back,
Planting his shadow of fear in the chalk.
O then he danced an incredible dance
With soot in his sockets, hanging at heels;
Uprooted mandrakes screamed in his loins,
His legs thrashed and lashed like electric eels;
For now he embraced the talent of iron,
The white-hot ore that comes from the hill,
The Word out of which the electrons run,
The snake in the rod and the miracle;
And as he embraced it the girders turned black,
Fused metal wept and great tears ran down,
Till his fingers like snails at last came unstuck
And he fell through the cage of the sun.¹

Cynicism in adolescents is, however, only a mood or even an experiment – trying out an attitude. It represents the obverse (or more

¹ From *Death on a Live Wire*, published by Longmans Green & Co. Ltd; the poem is also found in the valuable anthology, *Here Today*, Hutchinson Educational.

accurately, the frustration-aspect) of the idealism which is a more characteristic attitude of this stage and one that generally receives far too little attention. Thus, while such poems as Baldwin's fulfil a relatively transient need there is a wider possible use for others which reveal the idealism as well as some of the bitterness attendant upon its frustration, for example, Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum' or Auden's 'James Honeyman'. These occur to me particularly in view of their relevance to teenage support for such movements as C.N.D.

It is obviously impossible to do more than suggest a few types of literature that are relevant, and if I have concentrated upon those suitable for use with adolescents it is because this stage poses some of the most urgent problems for the teacher. In the first place, they will now normally be reading less than in their first two years – sometimes they may not be reading at all. Secondly, the very nature of adolescence imposes a greater demand than ever upon the teacher in terms of tact, insight and flexibility. The particular value of poetry at this stage is that it enables the teacher to cater for rapid changes in mood, interest and attitude amongst his pupils: it does not demand from them the sustained concentration which is needed in reading a novel and which they may no longer be capable of giving.¹ The confusion and ambivalence of adolescence – the bluster and the insecurity, the insensitivity and the sudden deep compassion, the rebellion and the remorse – these must be the constant object of the teacher's study. He needs to listen to Salinger's adolescent protagonist, mulling over his own incomprehensible conduct towards a girl friend whom he had suddenly and inexplicably rebuffed by informing her that she gave him 'a royal pain in the ass'. He attempted to repair the damage done, but could not keep it up:

The whole thing was sort of funny, in a way, if you thought about it, and all of a sudden I did something I shouldn't have. I laughed. And I have one of those very loud, stupid laughs. I mean if I ever sat behind myself in a movie or something, I'd probably lean over and tell myself to please shut up. It made old Sally madder than ever.

I stuck around for a while, apologizing and trying to get her to excuse me, but she wouldn't. She kept telling me to go away and leave her alone. So finally I did it. I went inside and got my shoes and stuff, and left without her. I shouldn't have, but I was pretty goddam fed up by that time.

If you want to know the truth, I don't even know why I started all that stuff with her. I mean about going away somewhere, to Massachusetts and Vermont and all. I probably wouldn't've taken her even if she'd wanted to go with me. She wouldn't have been anybody to go with. The terrible part,

¹ The same advantage belongs to the reading of extracts by the teacher; extracts chosen from amongst his personal favourites, but with the needs of the pupil constantly in his mind.

though, is that I MEANT it when I asked her. That's the terrible part. I swear to God I'm a madman.¹

In all the work of the kind described, whether it be with first- or fourth-year pupils, there will probably be some resistance to be broken down. If they come from bookless, television-dominated housing estates, this will be all the stronger. Meaningful reading, involving an active response, cannot be achieved unless we have created an atmosphere of confidence² – both in the teacher and in books. It follows that the child's experience of books needs to begin with material close enough to his own real or imaginary world for him to accept it. This does not only apply to fiction, of course, though that is my main concern here; his initial confidence in the library may spring from the discovery of a book about rabbit-keeping. Once we have established the necessary confidence in books, as relevant to life, we are in a position to stretch his imagination in a way that complements our work on creative writing. In stretching it, however, we need to know that there is a key for him to open the door of new experience – some point of contiguity between the writer's world and his own which may be the starting point for his exploration. In all this, we are only being what the Newsom Report would call *realistic*:

To set a class to study a carefully defined problem in human conduct and human relations into which boys and girls can project themselves and work out the various implications of different courses of action – this is realistic teaching. It is also imaginative teaching. Indeed very often the only way to be realistic is to use the imagination as an aid to responsible living, thus developing conscience from the stage of taboo to the level of insight. . . .³

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¹ J. D. Salinger: *The Catcher in the Rye*, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 140. The value of this book in the context we have been dealing with would be hard to over-estimate. Though each teacher will want to use it in his own way, like some of the short stories of Sillitoe, the reading needs, I think, to be *directed*. To encourage adolescents to read it on their own is to shirk the issue; the aim must be to bring some elements of private experience into the open and hence to help adolescents to see them objectively and come to terms with them. The sharing of an unembarrassing third person's experience with the teacher is an essential part of this objectification – an adolescent fourth-year is much too involved to be able to do this on his own, though a mature sixth-former may be able to do so.

² '... in this realm of the education of character, of wholeness, there is only *one* access to the pupil: his *confidence*. For the adolescent who is frightened and disappointed by an unreliable world, confidence means the liberating insight that there is human truth, the truth of human existence. When the pupil's confidence has been won, his resistance against being educated gives way to a singular happening: he accepts the educator as a person. He feels he may trust this man, that this man is not making a business out of him, but is taking part in his life, accepting him before desiring to influence him. And so he learns to *ask*. . . .

³ Confidence, of course, is not won by the strenuous endeavour to win it, but by direct and ingenuous participation in the life of the people one is dealing with . . . and by assuming the responsibility which arises from such participation. It is not the educational intention but it is the meeting which is educationally fruitful. . . . M. Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁴ *Half Our Future*, A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education, H.M.S.O., 1963, p. 115, para. 321.

In a book that attempts to present English as a unity, and to demonstrate the interdependence of all its aspects, there is something anomalous about having separate chapters. These in no sense represent separate topics but rather different angles from which to view the subject. The title of the present chapter is intended therefore to represent rather its bias than its exclusive preoccupation,¹ but the wording has some further significance. By associating the two facets, reading and comprehension, I seek to stress their unity; by placing comprehension second, an order of priority.

Despite the fact that any separation of the two seems to me undesirable, or illogical, what is loosely termed 'comprehension' represents a part of English about which there is sufficient practical agreement for it to be worth discussing on its own – as far as may be possible.

An examination of the parts of textbooks (together with innumerable complete volumes) devoted to this aspect of English will suggest that there is widespread agreement over one thing – comprehension is something that exists to be tested, by means of various kinds of exercise. The assumption is clearly that working from simpler to more exacting exercises will result in some benefit – that testing will teach. Had the normal practice been to select passages of relevance and interest to children at particular stages of their development, there might have been some justification for this assumption, but in fact the main effort seems to have been directed towards ensuring that Book II contains rather more exacting and unlikely material, and asks more baffling questions, than Book I. As we shall see, there are exceptions to this, but I believe this is a fair picture of the greater part of textbook comprehension material.

Here the reader may point to new developments in the testing of comprehension in public examinations, in particular to the acceptance of the idea of continuous writing in comprehension work at the level of the new Certificate of Secondary Education. These indeed are evidence of growing enlightenment, and of the realisation of the need for a positive personal response as the basis of critical discrimination.² One should not overestimate the influence of these new ideas, however. This is illustrated by recent reactions to various papers that are being set to test the English of prospective university students and to replace the previous O level English language qualification. As the result of

¹ It is significant that J. A. Cutforth and S. H. Battersby, after setting out to consider children's reading, finished up by surveying the whole field of English. See their introduction to *Children and Books*, Blackwell, 1962.

² I should, in fairness, mention that some textbooks have anticipated this development, employing only oral questioning, and requiring a response in a piece of continuous prose. Of this more anon.

criticism from schools, the new paper – as set, in this case, by the Northern Universities Joint Matriculation Board – has been taken by students but its establishment as a compulsory entrance requirement has had to be delayed, the schools pleading for more time. This is not the place to discuss the wider implications or content of the new paper, however; the point that seems to me ominously significant is that a substantial part of the criticism expressed has been based on the 'possible effect of the examination on the teaching of the subject in schools'.¹ In this criticism one detects strong traces of the assumption that, because a certain kind of comprehension test has been set, this needs to be prepared for by a series of exercises spread over a two-year course – that the way to teach comprehension, once again, is to test it.

There is, however, one type of comprehension exercise that deserves mention in this context. This is an approach to the programmed learning of poetry, developed in the United States by James M. Reid, and others. This exhaustive series of 230 questions, based on several readings of a poem,² may at first sight seem to be very similar to the kind of things I have been attacking. In any case I would not feel that such marathons should be undertaken frequently, but there is one point in which the approach differs fundamentally from the traditional one – it is a *teaching* device. There is a progression which takes the student deeper and deeper into the poem, and the questions are so framed that he learns a critical vocabulary which helps him to formulate his developing insights. James Reid is at pains to emphasise the teaching function of the programme:

You cannot read a program as you read a traditional book or magazine or newspaper article. You need to collaborate with the program, step by step, responding actively as you go. As Edmund Fuller of Kent School says, 'A program is a kind of exploded essay, with questions or statements with blanks or choices in them, inviting the participation of the reader to complete the essay . . .'

. . . A program is *not* a test. You (the learner) are being taught, not tested. Later on you will be tested on the things you have learned from the program, but working on the program itself is the best way for you to study for that future test. . . .

It is not possible to do justice to this approach by a few quotations. The reader is urged to read the explanation, from which the foregoing passages were taken, in an article 'An Adventure in Programing Literature', by James M. Reid, in *The English Journal*, December 1963.

¹ See *The Examining of English Language*, Eighth Report of the Secondary School Examination Council, H.M.S.O., 1964; particularly relevant sections are 23–5 inclusive, p. 5.

² Robert Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,' in *You Come Too*, Holt Rinehart and Wilson, Inc.

The four questions that follow are taken from the 'central part of the finished program', Steps 41-80, intended to guide a close third reading of Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' . . . (They may perhaps suffice to illustrate Reid's argument. All forty steps are quoted in the article mentioned above.)

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Robert Frost

Exploring the Larger Meanings

41. Before digging deeper into the poem, let us understand an important word: *symbol*. You are familiar with many symbols. The fox is a symbol of craftiness. A white flag is a — of surrender or truce. A king's crown is a — of his authority.
42. A symbol, then, brings to mind or stands for 'something-else'. The incident narrated in 'Stopping by Woods' contains a number of —. It suggests meanings that are far below the surface meaning of the narrative.
43. Let us see if we can discover the symbols in 'Stopping by Woods'. To do this, we will have to examine each detail in the poem and ask what is the 'something else' it brings to mind or — for.
44. By looking at the poem again, you are reminded that the narrator had four things pressing on his mind: 1. his thinking about the owner in the —; 2. the impatience of the little —; 3. the attraction of the —, 'dark and deep'; and 4. the 'miles to go' and the '— to keep'.¹

¹ The whole 'programed instruction' on Frost's poem is published, under the title *Poetry 230*, by Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., New York. It is worth mentioning that similar programmes have been devised on improvement of basic reading skills, how to read different types of literature, and the 'close reading of major literary works'. These, together, form a six-year course for grades 7-12.

It is to be hoped that approaches such as Reid's will ultimately lead to further experimentation along similar lines in English schools,¹ for it represents a marked advance on many of the meaningless exercises that are offered by our traditional method. Above all, it places the emphasis on exactly the right place – on teaching, and active participation of the reader. Thus questions become means of eliciting, guiding and deepening a personal response instead of merely assessing it.

There is a place for comprehension tests in the periodic assessment of pupils' progress, admittedly, but apart from this their value is very limited. The sensitive answering of traditional comprehension questions about poems, novels or plays places an intolerable strain on the verbal and intellectual resources of any but the most able children below the third- or fourth-year of secondary school. What, then, may be usefully undertaken earlier than this?

If one accepts that the first two years are best suited to the various kinds of exploration and experiment I have already described, it seems clear that the renunciation of formal comprehension exercises leaves time for much useful work, most of it oral and most of it based on creative reading and writing. As regards the former, a very helpful basic technique of oral questioning is that given by Professor Gurrey in his book *Teaching the Mother Tongue in Secondary Schools*.²

Professor Gurrey suggests that after a passage has been read silently, the class should be required to give oral answers to three types of question, which lead them on from mere factual accuracy to imaginative insight and personal response. The first type consists of extremely simple factual questions based on the text line by line and even word by word. He stresses the importance of these rather obvious questions in promoting the right kind of concentration amongst average and below-average children, their aim being to create confidence through the achievement of accurate response. Generally this process is carried out paragraph by paragraph, spending perhaps five to ten minutes on each. With the most able children such questioning may never be necessary, and even with the less able a general increase in the speed and accuracy of their response will probably indicate to the teacher when he may safely place less stress on this type of question and more on to the next stage.

Questions of the second type also keep closely to the text, but these now involve an increasing amount of imaginative inference, asking for information that is relevant to the text though not actually expressed

¹ They have already been tried with mixed results.

² Chapters 8 and 9.

in words. The aim here is to clarify understanding and deepen it so that a scene, or a person's emotions, may be imagined more fully and accurately. In such questions we have moved from what I have called 'passive' to 'active' reading. As Gurrey points out, it is important that questions to improve reading with precise imagining should not lead the pupils' minds out of the story but should promote concentration on it. 'The closer the focus, the truer will be the emotional response, if good literature is being read.'

He goes on to note an important further advantage of questioning of this kind:

... it helps the weaker readers to become more interested in what they read. Obviously, this is because they see more in it, and become more aware of the undercurrent of motive, external influence, emotion, etc., and they can imagine more vividly because details are more precise. When questions ask why this action was done and why that, what was the cause of this incident, and the result of that one, the more realistic and detailed imagining enables the slower ones to produce better answers. So, too, when questions ask about character, as revealed in speech and action, the readers can enter more imaginatively into the minds and thoughts of the persons in the story, and so understand them more fully: thus they enjoy their reading more, and their imaginations too are both corrected and cultivated. . . .¹

In a third type of question, there is a relaxation of this disciplined concentration which, as the author points out, we cannot reasonably expect the children to sustain much longer than, say, half an hour. The last ten minutes are thus given over to questions that aim to stimulate the children to produce ideas of their own arising from the passage read, by meditating upon it and thinking round it.

The mind in small diversions from a text is stimulated in a simple and easy way to follow individual lines of enquiry, and to make use of comparisons, personal experience and interests and knowledge, and also to make deductions, form conclusions, or to raise further questions. . . .²

Perhaps most pupils in school today need such questioning before they can produce thoughts that will arise behind the sentences they read; but the reading, supplemented by stimulating questions, that will cause thoughts to rise will also be favourable to the growth of the mind and personality, even of the slowest pupils: the necessity and the value of this reading and these questions therefore can hardly be over-estimated.³

I have dealt with this at some length, simply because it would be hard to better it. The teacher is here provided with techniques which combine to form an integrated system with clearly defined aims and which can be applied to almost any kind of 'reader' or literature, at almost any ability level. The stress on questioning – evident throughout

¹ P. Gurrey, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Professor Gurrey's book – is invaluable as a reminder that our task is to elicit and develop individual response, to *improve* comprehension instead of *testing* it.

The development of what may loosely be termed 'comprehension skills' is also fostered by the work described in Chapter 10, on critical evaluation. In addition, the application of the various other technical skills with which I have been concerned in Chapters 6 and 7 involves comprehension. Thus the understanding of the rôle of the key sentence in factual writing should enable the pupil both to grasp the basic outline of a passage more clearly and rapidly, and also to evaluate the effectiveness of the way major ideas are developed and illustrated. Similarly, work on mood and selection of detail in his own writing makes him more aware of these in the novels and poems that he reads.

Even the early experimentation with figurative language is not self-contained but leads on to a deeper understanding of the nature of the poet's vision and of what Ted Hughes has called 'the explosive compression'¹ of poetic language. The children should have learnt something of the difference between vital and ossified figurative language, and should have come to distrust common, ready-made expressions as being less likely to convey their individual experiences adequately. It is very easy to underestimate what can be achieved with relatively able first- and second-year children in work of the kind described here by M. K. Paffard:

I set out to establish in the children's minds, first, the distinction between an idea and an image and then the notion that the exact pattern of ideas, images and feelings which each one of them associates with a word or group of words is unique and individual. This may well sound like a piece of absurd high-falutin nonsense but I have found that even eleven- and twelve-year-olds in a grammar school have little difficulty in grasping the essentials of such notions although many university students arrive at college innocent of any such conception of language and its various functions.²

I would only add to this that such work is also feasible with children of secondary modern A-stream ability, provided it is deferred until perhaps the third year. Some explanation of the process of idea-association – introduced, perhaps, by a light-hearted word-association test round the class – is a positive aid in establishing the kind of response that the compressed language of poetry requires. This appreciation may be reinforced by contrasting suitable passages of poetry with factual writing involving no use of associated images and feelings, and demanding no imaginative response.

¹ See the introduction to the anthology already referred to – *Here Today*, Hutchinson.

² M. K. Paffard, in the first of two interesting articles on 'Free Writing' in *The Use of English*, Winter 1957, Volume IX, No. 2, Chatto and Windus.

In ways such as these, by the time the pupils are in their third and fourth years, they should have experimented with different kinds of writing and have learnt something of the motivation of different approaches. They should therefore be ready to be introduced to what seems to me the basic critical principle at this stage of their development – the concept of the writer's aim as determining our evaluation of what he has written. Criticism needs to be distinguished now from mere expression of opinion: if one criticises a bicycle, one needs to pay due attention to the function for which it was designed and the extent to which it fulfils that function; to say, 'I'd rather have a Rolls Royce,' is not a legitimate criticism.

Of course the subtleties of such a principle, as applied by I. A. Richards to the teaching of undergraduates,¹ for example, are beyond them, but much useful groundwork can be covered nevertheless. (I have found this particularly helpful in the study of newspapers, to which I shall be returning in the next chapter.) What one requires is a wide variety of different types of writing; the basic skill may be exercised and developed by the study of relatively crude contrasts of approach. Thus one is able to reinforce the distinctions between factual and evocative, subjective and objective, figurative and literal, persuasive and explanatory.² After reading some vivid description one might, for example, examine the following series of distress calls from a ship, widely reported in the press and on television:

One engine dead. Bad port list. One port lifeboat smashed. Have water in engine-room. No immediate danger yet.

No boats on the leeward side. Pumps can't handle overflow of water. Master wants to get crew off ship.

Actual conditions of sea very dangerous to put boats out. Have no lights. Flooding of engine-room increasing.

Just going over the side. Abandoning ship.²

Obviously, such material as this can be put to a variety of uses: if we were still concentrating on active imaginative reading we would perhaps want to test the response by a piece of empathetic writing, by a purely narrative account, or by an account from 'our reporter-on-the-spot'; any such responses would provide interesting material for contrast with the original, however, and in each case the starting point for criticism would be the same – what was the writer's aim? With the most able children a further interesting line of enquiry might be an attempt to see why the passage provoked so many ideas; why, despite its lack of emotive language, it was so emotive.

¹ See his *Practical Criticism*.

² From the *Guardian*, February 19th, 1964.

In most of such work we are once again examining the shaping viewpoint – but this time from a critical rather than a creative angle. After some practice in criticising their own work, fourth-year children of sound ability should be quite capable of grasping this fairly subtle idea. They should see how the absence of any shaping viewpoint or of any clear aim will lead to ineffectual writing and, conversely, how detail becomes meaningful when employed for a particular purpose. Again, continual reference to newspapers – particularly to cheap emotive writing – will help to drive this home. Provided they have plenty of practice, working on fairly accessible material, the teacher should also seek to extend them by offering something much more exacting – such as, for example, the following two passages from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nice little boy named baby tuckoo. . . .

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.

He was a baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt.

O, the wild rose blossoms
On the little green place.

He sang that song. That was his song.

O, the green wothe botheth.

When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell.

His mother had a nicer smell than his father. She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance. He danced:

Tralala lala,
Tralala tralaladdy,
Tralala lala,
Tralala lala.

Uncle Charles and Dante clapped. They were older than his father and mother but uncle Charles was older than Dante.

Dante had two brushes in her press. The brush with the maroon velvet back was for Michael Davitt and the brush with the green velvet back was for Parnell. Dante gave him a cachou every time he brought her a piece of tissue paper.

The Vances lived in number seven. They had a different father and mother. They were Eileen's father and mother. When they were grown up he was going to marry Eileen. He hid under the table. His mother said:

—O, Stephen will apologize.

Dante said:

—O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.—

Pull out his eyes,
Apologize,

Apologize,
Pull out his eyes.

Apologize,
Pull out his eyes,
Pull out his eyes,
Apologize.¹

*

The door opened quietly and closed. A quick whisper ran through the class: the prefect of studies. There was an instant of dead silence and then the loud crack of a pandybat on the last desk. Stephen's heart leapt up in fear.

—Any boys want flogging here, Father Arnall? cried the prefect of studies. Any lazy idle loafers that want flogging in this class?

He came to the middle of the class and saw Fleming on his knees.

—Hoho! he cried. Who is this boy? Why is he on his knees? What is your name, boy?

—Fleming, sir.

—Hoho, Fleming! An idler of course. I can see it in your eye. Why is he on his knees, Father Arnall?

—He wrote a bad Latin theme, Father Arnall said, and he missed all the questions in grammar.

—Of course he did! cried the prefect of studies, of course he did! A born idler! I can see it in the corner of his eye.

He banged his pandybat down on the desk and cried:

—Up, Fleming! Up, my boy!

Fleming stood up slowly.

—Hold out! cried the prefect of studies.

Fleming held out his hand. The pandybat came down on it with a loud smacking sound: one, two, three, four, five, six.

—Other hand!

The pandybat came down again in six loud quick smacks.

—Kneel down! cried the prefect of studies.

Fleming knelt down, squeezing his hands under his armpits, his face contorted with pain; but Stephen knew how hard his hands were because Fleming was always rubbing rosin into them. But perhaps he was in great pain for the noise of the pandybat was terrible. Stephen's heart was beating and fluttering.

—At your work, all of you! shouted the prefect of studies. We want no lazy idle loafers here, lazy idle little schemers. At your work, I tell you. Father Dolan will be in to see you every day. Father Dolan will be in tomorrow.

He poked one of the boys in the side with his pandybat, saying:

—You, boy! When will Father Dolan be in again?

—Tomorrow, sir, said Tom Furlong's voice.

—Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, said the prefect of studies. Make up your minds for that. Every day Father Dolan. Write away. You, boy, who are you?

Stephen's heart jumped suddenly.

—Dedalus, sir.

—Why are you not writing like the others?

—I . . . my . . .

He could not speak with fright.

—Why is he not writing, Father Arnall?

—He broke his glasses, said Father Arnall, and I exempted him from work.

—Broke? What is this I hear? What is this your name is! said the prefect of studies.

—Dedalus, sir.

—Out here, Dedalus. Lazy little schemer. I see schemer in your face. Where did you break your glasses?

Stephen stumbled into the middle of the class, blinded by fear and haste.

—Where did you break your glasses? repeated the prefect of studies.

—The cinder-path, sir.

—Hoho! The cinder-path! cried the prefect of studies. I know that trick.

Stephen lifted his eyes in wonder and saw for a moment Father Dolan's white-grey not young face, his baldy white-grey head with fluff at the sides of it, the steel rims of his spectacles and his no-coloured eyes looking through the glasses. Why did he say he knew that trick?

—Lazy idle little loafer! cried the prefect of studies. Broke my glasses! An old schoolboy trick! Out with your hand this moment!

Stephen closed his eyes and held out in the air his trembling hand with the palm upwards. He felt the prefect of studies touch it for a moment at the fingers to straighten it and then the swish of the sleeve of the soutane as the pandybat was lifted to strike. A hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scalding tears were driven into his eyes. His whole body was shaking with fright, his arm was shaking and his crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air. A cry sprang to his lips, a prayer to be let off. But though the tears scalded his eyes and his limbs quivered with pain and fright he held back the hot tears and the cry that scalded his throat.

—Other hand! shouted the prefect of studies.

Stephen drew back his maimed and quivering right arm and held out his left hand. The soutane sleeve swished again as the pandybat was lifted and a loud crashing sound and a fierce maddening tingling burning pain made his hand shrink together with the palms and fingers in a livid quivering mass. The scalding water burst forth from his eyes and, burning with shame and agony and fear, he drew back his shaking arm in terror and burst out into a whine of pain. His body shook with a palsy of fright and in shame and rage he felt the scalding cry come from his throat and the scalding tears falling out of his eyes and down his flaming cheeks.

—Kneel down, cried the prefect of studies.

Stephen knelt down quickly pressing his beaten hands to his sides. To think of them beaten and swollen with pain all in a moment made him feel so sorry for them as if they were not his own but someone else's that he felt sorry for. And as he knelt, calming the last sobs in his throat and feeling the burning tingling pain pressed into his sides, he thought of the hands which he had held out in the air with the palms up and of the firm touch of the prefect of studies when he steadied the shaking fingers and of the beaten swollen reddened mass of palm and fingers that shook helplessly in the air.

—Get at your work, all of you, cried the prefect of studies from the door. Father Dolan will be in every day to see if any boy, any lazy idle little loafer wants flogging. Every day. Every day.

The door closed behind him.*

Any detailed analysis of these passages would be outside the scope of

* *Op. cit.*, pp. 48-51.

this book but there are certain fairly practical observations to be made. I quote the passages, firstly, as exemplifying the thoroughly adult material that needs occasionally to be introduced into lessons with able fourth-year children in order to ensure that they are suitably extended. Secondly, it will be noted that – complex and difficult though the treatment may appear – the experiences themselves fall well within the range of the pupils' comprehension; the essential condition – of a point of contact or analogy between the writer's world and that of the child – is fulfilled, thus providing the latter with an avenue of approach. Thirdly, the passages link up well with other aspects of English work already emphasised.

Thus both passages illustrate the essential part in imaginative reading played by a sensitive 'inner ear'. A rapid, a merely passive, visual reading, of the first extract particularly, is unlikely to produce much response and the essential clues to the writer's intention and method are only found when the reader begins to hear the words in his head. Hence the question which I suggested was often helpful in the silent reading of poetry – 'How should this be read?' – is once more appropriate. It might well preface the teacher's injunction to read the passage a second time. Again, it may help the pupils to ask them to imagine that they are preparing a passage which they are later to read aloud to the rest of the class – here they must try to decide beforehand what expression, what rhythm and what pace are required. With what expression, for example, should they read the line –

He sang that song. That was his song.?

In the lines –

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.

– which words require emphasis, and why? After these questions, several pupils are asked to read the first paragraph aloud, and the others invited to comment on the effectiveness of the various interpretations.

By such means the class may gradually begin to 'hear' the words properly. This growing understanding of the passage can be carried a stage further by some consideration of the structure: why are there no full stops in the first paragraph and why are there heavily marked pauses everywhere else? So the pupils are led to see the expression, the choice of words (helped here by such obvious clues as 'nicens' and 'wothe'), the curious sentence structure and arrangement as technical devices employed to a particular end – a reflection of the peculiarly

breathless, fragmented and egocentric vision of a very young child.

The second passage is a particularly good one to try if the pupils already have some experience of empathetic writing as described in the fourth chapter. If they have begun to develop this kind of sensibility, they should be able to enjoy this astonishing piece of writing. Once again, however, even empathy is not enough – they must *hear* the demoniacal incantations of the prefect of studies if they are to begin to understand what the writer is doing. Only when they can hear the extraordinarily exaggerated menace in the ringing – and absurd – ejaculation, ‘Hoho! The cinder path!’ can they begin to wonder about the purpose of the passage and so be led to the discovery that what interests the writer is not the narration of an incident, but the way the happenings are registered by the boy’s mind – not what happened in the classroom but what went on in the mind of the victim. Thus if the prefect’s behaviour seems mad, as some pupils will suggest, this is quite simply because they are responding correctly, and sharing the sufferer’s viewpoint as the author intended they should.

If all this seems – to borrow Mr Paffard’s phrase – ‘absurd high-falutin nonsense’, I would merely repeat that I am chiefly anxious that we should not underestimate the pupil’s capacity to respond.¹ I have found that such passages as these, dealing with experiences that the pupil can interpret from analogous experience of his own, are capable of eliciting a good response from even secondary modern children in the fourth year. In a sense, the second passage is particularly well suited to the less able adolescents, in that it deals with what is often a pre-occupation of theirs – the incomprehensible behaviour of authority; and one must concede that there exists among teachers a neurotic

¹ Significant support for any attempt to lead children towards some understanding of the way in which a writer’s technique is related to his aim or intention is contained in the Eighth Report of the Secondary School Examinations Council, *The Examining of English Language*, H.M.S.O., 1964.

‘Understanding, however, extends not only to the vocabulary of a passage, interpreted in its immediate context, but beyond that to the line of argument which is pursued, the structure of a narrative and the outlines of a description. It extends also to the intention of the writer and the tone of the passage. Tests of reading should set out to measure a candidate’s ability to follow what he reads, his power of verbal reasoning or inference, his capacity for holding together the threads of what is said to him, whether in argument or narrative or description. We believe that questions based upon a candidate’s reading of an ‘unseen’ passage can provide a satisfactory means of doing this. Such questions should aim at setting up the same kind of activity as takes place when a reader is faced with a difficult passage. They should not, as they have often done in the past, distract him by their triviality or irrelevance or even their ingenuity. They should be grouped in such a way as to set up a train of thought which takes the candidate in the direction of the important central ideas and the purpose or point of view of the writer; and should finally test him upon such matters.’ para. 93, p. 22. (It is interesting to note that the section from which this is taken contains an acknowledgement of the writers’ debt to I. A. Richards’ *Interpretation in Teaching*.)

minority whose obsession with trivia bears comparison with that of the prefect of studies in almost every detail.



Those aspects of English that fall under the general heading 'Reading and Comprehension' illustrate with particular clarity the difficulty of the teacher's rôle; in his attempts to promote a habit of active response, problems face him at every turn. The most serious of these are often related to the children's background: frequently the teacher will face classes for three-fifths of whose pupils books represent an alien culture. Quite apart from contending against the mental inertia of bookless, television-dominated homes, the teacher is likely to be handicapped by a legacy of unsuitable and often outworn textbooks and readers which there is insufficient money to replace; the library – if it exists – will be short of books, and will probably be a partially converted classroom only open at certain times of the day because it is needed for ordinary teaching.

In short, the difficulties may appear insuperable. Whether the situation is as bad as this or not, however, there is no easy answer: no list of suitable readers or texts will apply to every school, nor be adapted to the personality and methods of every teacher. Edward Blishen, who frequently emphasises just this point, tells an amusing story of how one boy came to 'discover' books. After several years as a determined non-reader, he borrowed from the library the largest tome it contained. His motives remained obscure, and the amount he actually read doubtful – since the book was in fact a compendious history of wallpaper manufacture – but with it he scored an undoubted social success. His peers were intrigued by the enormous volume he had secured, and even openly envious of such a notable coup, and the satisfaction he derived from this situation was sufficient to mark the beginning of a real interest in books. In other words, even irrelevant motivations of this kind may be a starting point in breaking down the resistance of the reluctant reader; the teacher must know how to utilise the slightest opportunity.

In so far as it is possible to generalise, however, the successful encouragement of reading seems to depend primarily upon two fundamental and complementary factors: the teacher-pupil relationship and the classroom atmosphere. If resistances are to be broken down the class must have faith in the teacher – one does not willingly let go of one support unless there is a better one to cling to. Where the teacher has managed, in the other work, to establish the climate of active awareness to which I have frequently referred, there is generally the

right kind of confidence, based on mutual interest and mutual respect, on their recognition that the teacher is aware of their world, and on the accumulated experience of previous collaboration with him which has proved stimulating and enjoyable. Confidence brings with it an increased willingness to experiment – closed minds beginning to open.

Amongst the teacher's enthusiasms which they may now be prepared to take seriously will be a love of books and reading. I have already suggested, however, that the 'lover of good literature' is by no means certain of success and have stressed the need to get down to the children's level. The teacher who is sensitive and flexible enough to do this will not wish to continue indefinitely on this level but will want ultimately to use it as a springboard for further effort of a more exacting kind and when he begins to extend their reading experience he will not, like the old school, be merely giving them 'doses of literature' of some predetermined standard. His choice of reading may certainly be made from his own favourites, but always with the needs and capacity of his pupils in mind.

The importance of the teacher's own evident attitude to books cannot easily be exaggerated. If he is continually demonstrating their relevance to all kinds of topics in the classroom, and if he has the children's respect, then he will gradually begin to make converts. The quality of his own reading is a vital factor in this, and by 'quality' I do not mean so much purity of sound and excellence of articulation so much as the expressive character of his speech: the basic qualities his reading must have are life and zest – the capacity to bring a story or poem alive and to communicate his own enjoyment. Where such communication is successful, remarkable things may be achieved; thus I know of one very gifted junior school teacher¹ whose (selective) readings from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* have stimulated the children to really excellent work. It is hardly the first book that would spring to mind for work at such a level, but has made an impact through the interpretation of a respected teacher.

The teacher is therefore under an obligation to read expressively and to labour critically to improve his performance. All too often – perhaps as a hangover from days when reading to the class was an expedient 'to keep them quiet' – teachers seem extraordinarily diffident about doing this. Such diffidence should disappear, however, when the reading is viewed, properly, as a means of 'keeping them alive' – of fostering a wide range of active response.

¹ Mr Tom Haggett, whose work – together with that of other enlightened teachers – is described in *Children and Books*, by J. A. Cutforth and S. H. Battersby, Blackwell.

Apart from the teacher's contribution, what should the children read? The practice of issuing sets of texts deemed suitable for particular age-groups is one that dies hard, even though it has some singularly unfortunate effects. With children of the highest intellectual calibre, under the control of exceptionally gifted teachers, the process may still have considerable value, but for most children, particularly those in the third and fourth years of average or below-average ability, it seems indefensible. If, as I contend, one of the teacher's prime requisites in his guidance of children's reading should be a sensitive awareness of their needs and interests, he will find it extraordinarily difficult to justify the use of a set reader in such a context. The differing rate of maturation alone – quite apart from the differently orientated patterns of interest of boys and girls of the thirteen-fifteen age-range – renders virtually impossible the task of choosing a set text of interest and value to all. The situation is exacerbated in schools where not only are set readers given to each form but where particular periods are allocated to their use. Any more artificial way of providing literary experience could hardly be imagined: on the one hand, those who do not like the book face the unenviable prospect of working through – or even reading round the class – perhaps a chapter of a novel every Thursday afternoon for a period of *n* weeks; on the other, those who enjoy it normally – and very sensibly – read it at home during the first two or three weeks and are therefore scarcely less bored during the remainder of the term than their less enlightened friends.

There are, however, occasions when the possession by each member of the class of a copy of the same text – be it play or novel – offers valuable opportunities to the teacher. In such cases there is everything to be said for intensive teaching – whereby a play or novel is 'done' in a short period, other work being temporarily laid aside. This is the nearest we can get to reproducing in the classroom the continuity of attention which is necessary for proper enjoyment – imagine the lunacy of attempting, in one's private reading, to enjoy a novel by allowing oneself an hour per week in which to read it! If we enjoy a novel, a play, or a detective story it is because of the total imaginative experience we have undergone, and we need to reproduce the 'wholeness' of this experience in our work in the classroom as far as is humanly possible.

If 'class readers' have such limited value because of their failure to cater for the individual's needs and interests, what is the teacher to do? One possibility is to provide several small sets of texts, breaking the class up into groups according to some criterion, whether it be

maturity, sex, interest or whatever. This is a fairly inadequate compromise, and is still insufficiently flexible, but I mention it because it has certain advantages with less able children. This is particularly so if the teacher needs to provide practice in reading aloud and is able to use a room larger than the usual one – perhaps a dining-room. Here the children may be grouped at some distance from each other and may obtain practice in reading aloud. Admittedly, the teacher can only gain a rough impression of their progress by walking from group to group, but in small groups each child's turn comes round quite rapidly and though the general noise level may have been difficult to control, at the end of the lesson every child should have read several times.

The use of set readers of any kind, however, can at best only supplement reading activities centred on the school library which, according to the Newsom Report, ought to be the power-house of words and ideas.¹

To ensure that it fulfils this function means hard work on the part of the teacher. All too often library periods tend to be equated with study periods; provided the children are quiet, and seem to be looking at books, the teacher may be tempted to 'let them get on with it'. This may happen as a result of early discouragements rather than any slackness or cynicism. In this field, as elsewhere, the teacher must not look for rapid results – the establishment of a good 'library tradition' can only be achieved by team effort over a period of several years. The work is intensely demanding, primarily, because it means giving individual attention to each child and if the teacher manages to deal with the needs of a third of the class in any one library period, he is quite justified in feeling pretty exhausted at the end. Secondly, library periods demand preparation: the achievement of previous periods in the library needs to be critically examined so that different aspects of its use are not neglected, and so that there is a continual attempt to use the short time available as economically as possible. Not least important, the teacher needs constantly to be extending his knowledge of the books available, and this demands not only time but imaginative effort. Margery Fisher's comments upon C. S. Lewis' remark that he is 'almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's book' are so relevant here that I make no apology for quoting them at length:

Enjoyed. That is the word to note in Lewis's remarks. When we write about children's books we are in a special position. We bring an experience of reading to bear on books which are not intended primarily for us, in which

¹ *Half Our Future*, Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England), H.M.S.O., 1963, p. 154, para. 469.

we share by invitation. We should not make public pronouncements about such books if we do not like them or if we do not like the kind of book which they are perhaps failing to be. If we have forgotten the delight of sailing sticks down a gutter, we cannot really get far with the chronicles of a four-year-old's day. If we think of horses simply as large and alarming, we should leave pony books alone. Enjoyment must come first. And then, we must try to remember what it is like to read like a child, with that pure, headlong, unguarded enthusiasm Agnes Repplier described.¹ And, remembering this, we must look for the virtues that a child looks for in his books – energy, sincerity, imagination. All this must be reconciled with the duty of a literary critic to state standards and measure books against them. The average child does not think, when he is reading a story, how good the style is or how well drawn the characters; but we know he will get more lasting pleasure from reading Walter de la Mare or Arthur Ransome than more sensational, superficial writers. We have to recommend from an adult standpoint: at the same time, we have to read with what knowledge we have of the tastes of childhood.²

This may seem to bear upon an earlier stage of development than that with which we are concerned, but the same approach is needed. In her conclusion, moreover, Margery Fisher gives some sane advice about the children's reading at a more advanced stage:

... young people must plunge in adult fiction, from twelve or so onwards, and must do this unafraid and unchecked. We can advise and suggest, but we should not select or censor. The glitter of the forbidden is potent for young people. We must trust them, rather, to choose, as they have been choosing all along, the books which are most valuable to them. They will form their taste after trial and error and in no other way.

The most valuable quality a child can have, in his reading life, is curiosity. Easily squashed, it is as easily encouraged by the provision of books varied in style and content. If our children can advance into the world of adult fiction with an intense curiosity about human relations, about the position of man in the world, about the technique of writing, they will not go far wrong. If they have grown up with good will towards reading as a necessity of life and one of its major pleasures, they will confirm what they have long unconsciously known, that 'all books are children's books.'

To follow up the implications of all this would seem a tall order by itself, but once again, in J. S. Mill's phrase, it is a question of aiming 'at too much, to be assured of doing enough'. The teacher must set his sights uncompromisingly high, at the same time being unruffled by disappointment. Furthermore, I have as yet sketched only part of his scope in this field.

The remaining aspects of his work in the library are applications of a fundamental principle that I have sought to stress all along – namely, that his function is to integrate, to stimulate and deepen response by the discovery and stressing of the interdependence of all the multifarious activities that form part of the subject we call 'English'. Thus if the

¹ 'What Children Read', in *Books and Men*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1888.

² Margery Fisher: *Intent upon Reading*, Brockhampton Press, 1961, pp. 11-12.

library period is something on its own, it is unlikely to be successful. To what, then, can it be related?

Firstly, perhaps to books as sources of information. Obviously the teacher must give scope for the reading of books of this type, particularly with those pupils who are reluctant readers of fiction. Equally obviously, some intensive practice in the use of reference books – perhaps using some kind of ‘question-card’ – must be provided within the framework of library work. Sometimes this may be linked with work on hobbies. The child needs to have confidence, not only in the teacher, but in books also, and often the only way to break down resistance to them may be by encouraging him to use them to foster some private interest. Even more important in this context is the use of the library for the initial research stages of project work.

The significance of this lies precisely in its integration of various activities: individual activities of reading, writing and speaking, on the one hand; on the other, communal activities involving the discussion and critical arrangement of basic material by groups working towards a common end. Not only is this of great importance in breaking down the compartmentalisation of different aspects of the same ‘subject’, but also in eradicating the concept of subjects themselves as self-contained units.

Quite apart from project work, however, the library period needs to be linked with writing. In the first place, I think, the keeping of a written record of books read may provide practice in a variety of skills – narrative, descriptive, précis, criticism. The nature of the record must depend on the teacher’s assessment of the children’s needs, and should also provide some variety of challenge. In general, however, most children need to be steered gradually away from mere recapitulation towards the expression of personal opinions – with an increasing stress on backing up opinions with reasons and with close reference to particular aspects or parts of the books read. For such work to be fully effective, and to ensure some kind of progression, reading lists for particular ages and ability ranges will probably be necessary. The designing of these lists, paying proper attention to the needs¹ of particular types of child, is not the least exacting of the tasks to devolve upon the head of department. There is no definitive source-list for him to use and he will need to evolve his own as the result of experiment and constant revision over a period of years. Such lists, which should also include a wide range of suitable non-fiction, are not to be thought of as exclusive but as ensuring that a certain stipulated number of suitable books of various types are read each year.

¹ Including the type of environment – rural, suburban, industrial or whatever it may be.

It is significant that in some schools reading has been thought so fundamental that the whole English teaching has been based upon work on such book lists. Whether or not one would wish to go as far as this, the integrating function of such a strong central focus can only be healthy in its effects.

One hopes that by leading children to write reports of books read – and reviews, to be displayed in the library or classroom – their discrimination may be extended, so that ultimately the teacher may not need to offer so much advice, his functions in recommending books being taken over by the pupils themselves. In order to achieve this, he must give opportunity in classroom or library for some regular exchange of ideas about books, discussion in which – ideally – he plays only a minor part. To give any satisfactory account of a book is a thoroughly exacting and meaningful oral exercise (and provides yet another point of contact between different aspects of the subject). Children often disagree violently in their judgments and the resultant arguments may be a very lively regular feature of the term's work.

There must be some with whom all this talk of the school library will leave a bitter taste – some who will imagine fresh, enthusiastic, ingenuous young teachers reading and believing it all, and who will smile cynically to themselves at the disillusionment that awaits such naïve souls. The position is put clearly in the Newsom Report:

Roughly two-fifths (of the schools studied) have libraries built for the purpose; two-fifths have improvised libraries and one-fifth no library at all . . . nearly half (47 per cent) of the schools have rooms used exclusively for library purposes, a third (32 per cent) have library rooms which are also classrooms. . . .¹

The tragic implications of these figures will probably only be evident to those who have been fortunate enough to see the impact upon such schools of a really live 'library tradition', an impact which is felt not merely in English but in the life and morale of the community as a whole. It is no good being patient and long-suffering about this. Teachers generally seem too diffident in their demands; they ask, rather hopelessly, for twenty new books where they would be justified in demanding two hundred.

While our dissatisfaction with the paucity of library provision² must

¹ *Op cit.*, pp. 255–6, para. 679.

² It is not merely a question of premises, but of books. There are schools with quite good libraries tastefully decorated with empty shelves. To work from properly designed reading lists means that many books need to be ordered in half-dozens, not single copies. To establish a good library in a large school requires at least £1,000 per annum for the first seven years.

be militantly expressed, however, we need meanwhile to make the best of a bad situation. In this, one feature of modern life is particularly to our advantage – I refer to the enormous increase in the production and popularity of paperbacks. This makes possible the establishment of class libraries by levying a yearly toll of perhaps half-a-crown. For this modest sum each member of the class has thirty or forty suitable books to read. Moreover, since children, like adults, tend to appreciate things which ‘cost them something’ more than those that are provided free, this method tends to ensure that the class library is a matter of communal pride, and that the books are valued, careless use thereof bringing upon the culprit’s head the vastly effective wrath of his peers.

Where there is an initial resistance to any such scheme a start can be made with children in the first year, who are generally keen enough to co-operate with an enthusiastic teacher. The success of the scheme in the first year should then enable the practice to be carried on in subsequent years. It is, moreover, easy to arrange with local booksellers for periodic exhibitions of a wide selection of paperbacks on a sale or return basis. This device, which may be the means of breaking down resistance further up the school, is also used by many schools to supplement the work of the library and is generally a most effective way of creating and sustaining interest in books of all kinds.



I shall conclude by glancing once again at some aspects of the teacher’s rôle in the teaching of comprehension – aspects which, even at the risk of tedious repetition, merit this re-emphasis. If the teacher’s control and direction of his pupils’ reading involved the integration of various branches of English, the same is true in his direction of their work on ‘comprehension’. In the first place, this will not primarily be thought of as an activity performed on ‘snippets’ and separated from the reading of whole texts. Secondly, the teacher will see comprehension as an activity involving various kinds of writing and will provide the child with frequent opportunities to respond, in continuous writing,¹ to what he has ‘comprehended’. In this sense, the first four chapters of this book may be seen as ‘about comprehension’; wherever the imaginative writing is even partially stimulated by response to the written word, creative writing and creative reading go hand in hand.

Apart from this fundamental relationship, the teacher will seek also to explore possible connections between the understanding of a variety of technical skills and the child’s own use of language, believing that

¹ As opposed to short answers to specific comprehension questions.

techniques of style and structure are best understood if introduced at stages when the pupils are to some extent capable of imitating them – of making the techniques their own by using them. This process of the extension of technique by enjoyable experiment and imitation seems to me to be complementary to the creative writing described in the first chapters, and should run parallel to it. Of course the element of ‘comprehension’ is here not really separable from what I have called ‘playing with ideas’ – as the following illustration may show. This exercise, which I have found consistently effective with even moderately able children, is taken from *Understanding and Enjoyment*, Book 3.¹ The pupils are required to read several passages of archaic English and then, after answering various oral questions, to imitate them. I quote below enough of the children’s favourite passage – from Philip Stubbes’ *The Anatomie of Abuses* – for the reader to be able to assess the merits of the second passage, written by a moderately able boy in his third year.

For as concerning football playing, I protest unto you it may rather be called a friendly kind of fight, than a play or recreation; a bloody and murdering practice, than a fellowly sport or pastime. For doth not every one lie in wait for his adversary, seeking to overthrow him and to pick him on his nose, though it be upon hard stones, in ditch or dale, in valley or hill, or what place soever it be he careth not, so he have him down. And he that can serve the most of this fashion, he is counted the only fellow and who but he? So that by this means, sometimes their necks are broken, sometimes their backs, sometimes their legs, sometime their arms, . . . But whosoever escapeth away the best goeth not scot-free, but is either sore wounded, and bruised, so as he dieth of it, or else scapeth very hardly. . . .

Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, 2nd Edition, 1583

The passages are followed in the text by oral questions which lead up to various suggestions for continuous writing, amongst which is the subject of the following – ‘settling down to an evening’s homework’.

For as concerning homework, I protest unto you it may be called a torture, than a study; a bloody and murderous torture, than a thing of learning. For doth not schoole masters enjoy to see the suffering pupils whimper under lashes as they slaveth away over blood-soaked books and they careth not so to torture them. And he that serves the most of this fashion, he is counted the only schoole master and who but he? So that by these means, sometimes they droppeth dead with exhaustion, sometimes they dieth with whip wounds, sometimes injured in one place, sometimes in another. But whosoever scapeth

¹ *Understanding and Enjoyment*, Book 3, p. 24. Oxford University Press. The great virtue of this book is that it ministers to comprehension through exactly the kind of varied and quite exacting experimentation with language that really able children both need and enjoy. It is one of the very few textbooks I have found myself dipping into year after year. Moreover, though only academic children could use it right through, many of the passages can be used with, say, a secondary modern A- or B-stream, particularly if the work is deferred until the fourth year. It is for this reason that I have chosen as illustration a piece of writing by a third-year boy who probably would not have got into a grammar school.

one lesson scapeth not another, but is whipped to death or dies on a cold bench of wood. And no marvel for the masters have sticks of fire and racks in their dungeons and a hundred such other murdering devices. . . .

The method of preliminary oral questioning used in this course book, and already referred to, serves to emphasise another important point: not only will the teacher place an increased stress on continuous writing as a means of developing powers of comprehension but he will also emphasise oral work – to quote the Newsom Report once again –

Side by side with speech comes its partner listening; conversation presupposes both, but too few pupils ever learn to listen carefully, to the teacher or to each other. . . .¹

It seems reasonable, therefore, to condemn any teaching of comprehension which ignores the teaching of listening. Here we have yet another justification for the reading of passages by the teacher; the impact may be even more striking if the children read work of their own while the rest of the class listen to it and give an assessment. Occasionally, children may be asked to write for homework an account of that day's lesson, being given the last five minutes to make notes while it is still fresh in their minds. This technique has at least three further advantages: if used only very occasionally, it helps to keep children on their toes; it gives practice in note-taking and the critical evaluation of the relative importance of several ideas; finally, and not least important, it may give the teacher valuable insight into the clarity or otherwise of his exposition. It would be wrong to regard it as merely a 'dirty trick' to catch out people who had been dreaming; after all, if there has been much inattention it is not necessarily the children who are to blame.

As I have suggested earlier, it is easy to underestimate the capacities even of children we know well. This is particularly true of their capacity to listen carefully – if they are given some opportunity to develop it. There is a radio game in which a passage of a factual nature is read to a volunteer from the audience who, if he can answer a number of questions on it, receives a small prize. Games such as this are generally enjoyed by children, who with practice show surprisingly retentive memories. Not only are they capable of grasping facts in this way, but I have known them reconstruct, sentence by sentence, the vocabulary of almost a whole paragraph, after having heard it read only once. This is a particularly valuable exercise with less able children, or those who are habitually inattentive, and practice leads consistently to a rapid improvement.

¹ *Half Our Future*, p. 153, para. 467.

To include 'active listening' as well as various kinds of writing under the heading 'comprehension' is to give the term a much broader significance than it usually enjoys. I would extend it still further, however, so that what we normally mean by the word in its narrow sense may be related to the development of an active response to a very wide range of stimuli. I have perhaps said enough already about the use of pictures to justify their inclusion under the broad heading of comprehension work, but in this context of visual stimulation, there is one further point that is worth making. If the classroom itself is to be conducive to the kind of awareness that I have stressed, it should be a place that is visually stimulating. There is no one way of achieving this, but the general approach will be suggested by comparing the average classroom in a primary school with its secondary counterpart: in the one, the walls are covered with charts, pictures, questions, written work, information, which are changed frequently as the weeks go by; in the other, the sole visual stimulation is probably provided by a homework timetable or a list of detentions already several months out of date. Obviously the use to which the classrooms are put in the primary school differs from their function at secondary level – in the latter, particularly, the classes come and go, so that the room cannot reflect the life of a group of children in the same way. This is surely no reason for allowing them to be so damnably dull as most rooms in grammar schools are.¹

By accepting response to various kinds of visual and aural stimuli as part of comprehension, we move towards the development of real sensibility and open up a fascinating field for exploring the characteristic potentialities of different media, and therefore for co-operation between teachers of English, art, music and movement. Thus, if one is working on mood, comprehension of poem and picture may go hand in hand. I have elaborated on this already, but it may be worth quoting an extract from a comprehension test based on this idea. Here, instead of using the Scovell poem, *Boy Fishing*,² on its own, I gave it to a second-year class of good ability after they had studied a painting of a boy playing the piano. The questions were as follows:

1. What is the mood of the picture?

¹ One is even tempted to propound a law: that the dreariness of the décor is in direct proportion to the academic pretensions of the establishment. The underlying assumption that, for the academic child, such 'frills' are unnecessary, or unconnected with the 'serious business of education', is still widespread, alas!

² My frequent references to this should serve to illustrate the variety of uses to which well-proven stimulus material may be put.

2. Why have you been asked to look at these two things together?
3. What have they in common?

Here is one girl's set of answers, which I quote in the hope that one such concrete example will indicate some of the possibilities. (It would have been possible to use a piece of music to suggest a similar mood.)

Boy Playing the Piano (picture) and Boy Fishing (poem) Comprehension on mood

1. Industrious, studious and quiet, thoughtfull that is the general feeling. The room is dim lit only by the rays of the sun. The walls, floor and furniture are dull and lifeless in colour. The furnishings and ornaments are old fashioned and well-worn. The portrait of probably a relative hangs over the piano which is old fashioned and ornamented. The man's clothes are also old fashioned and he sits erect in his chair. He is studying a musical manuscript which he is probably trying to teach himself.
2. Because both the poem and the picture have an air of quietness about them, the boy is quiet because he is trying to catch fish. The man is quite because he is studying. The poem says the boy is sitting as 'still as a stone' and the man is still and erect.
3. We were given the poem to read now because they both have the same kind of feeling, the poem in words and the picture in details and to compare them mentally. They both have a feeling of stillness and gloom.

It follows from all this that comprehension in its fullest sense embraces too much to be contained in a textbook. While such aids may be helpful, the essential is for the teacher to stimulate lively response by anything that occurs to him – no one can foster the ideal classroom climate, nor promote enjoyable experiment, who is not himself constantly experimenting.

9 – *Building a Resistance*

Why look you now, how unworthy a thing you would make of me: you would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops. . . . Why do you think that I am easier to be played on, than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

Hamlet, Act III, Sc. 1

If our purpose is art, education, the giving of information or opinion, our interpretation will be in terms of the rational and interested being. If, on the other hand, our purpose is manipulation – the persuasion of a large number of people to act, feel, think, know, in certain ways – the convenient formula will be that of the masses.

Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*

Those most concerned with education must feel that many features of modern life are inimical to that full development of ability and personality which we would wish to promote. Among such features, the manipulation of the individual is sufficiently marked for our sense of affront to human dignity to be no less than Hamlet's own, and for us to long to utter a similarly spirited defiance. This would be a stirring but hardly a realistic gesture, however, at a time when the techniques of hidden persuasion have been developed to such a degree of precision and efficacy, and are so widely recognised and condoned, that they seem likely at any moment to be dignified by the name of science.

In answer to such apparent pessimism, some will point to various signs and portents of a new, and hopeful, awareness of some of the dangers which threaten western society. They may draw attention to the enormous popularity of some critical works such as Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, ascribing this popularity to a new enlightenment – clear proof that there are fewer ostriches around. This is no doubt partly true, but it is not the whole truth. In the first place, such books are only popular within a small section of society; secondly, one may have some reservations about the depth of real awareness that exists even within that section. Vance Packard is concerned to explain the way in which modern advertising technique exploits various unconscious needs and urges in the potential consumer, one of the more

important features of this being the selling of a 'reassurance of worth'. Certain of the appeals made to the housewife, for instance, are designed subtly to emphasise her central, maternal, creative rôle in the household – a suggestion which she finds comforting, and which encourages her to buy. It seems to me arguable that, to some at least of Vance Packard's readers, his books may – paradoxically – supply a similar kind of reassurance. It is obviously uncomfortable to feel that one is being got at, in ways one doesn't understand: nobody likes to feel he is a 'sucker', and merely to have read *The Hidden Persuaders* may be sufficient to reassure him. Feeling that he is 'wise to their game' he may now sit back, warmed by a pleasing consciousness of his superiority over those others who are unaware that they are being manipulated. Whether or not this happens in a particular case, the capacity of human beings to blind themselves to the uncomfortable or the unpleasant can hardly be exaggerated. We must then beware complacency, and must recognise too that it is possible for a certain, rather shallow, critical awareness to coexist with it.

The connection between this somewhat pious warning and work in the classroom will not be very clear. Quite apart from the racy journalism of Packard, however, the impact and importance of mass media in our society have been the subject of very extensive comment and criticism in recent years. This has been increasingly reflected in schools – in English teaching especially – so that it is now quite common to find discussions going on about advertising or television, or to see a class engaged on a newspaper project. It is 'quite common' – and this is encouraging – but it should be the universal practice.¹ Not only is this work still too rare, however; some of it also appears dangerously superficial, calculated to induce a facile cynicism.

Our aim must be more ambitious – at the very least, we must work towards the creation of a *healthy* cynicism. And for cynicism to be healthy it must be balanced by positive values and idealisms. This is particularly necessary if the work is to be undertaken with children in the third and fourth years of secondary school. We have continually to remind ourselves that adolescents are peculiarly vulnerable, though this

¹ Cf. *Half Our Future*, p. 156, especially the following:

'The culture provided by all the mass media, but particularly by film and television represents the most significant environmental factor that teachers have to take into account. The important changes that take place at the secondary stage are much influenced by the world offered by the leisure industry which skilfully markets products designed for young people's tastes. The media help to define aspirations and they offer rôles and models. They not only supply needs (and create them) but may influence attitudes and values. Little as yet has been effectively undertaken in schools in the way of offering some counter balancing assistance. . . .'

may often be concealed by a defensive front of toughness or insouciance.¹ Whatever we think of their gods we should beware of any urge to smash them outright, for there can be no doubt that they supply something that adolescents need: if we seek merely to replace them by what seem to us worthier objects of idealism, we are liable also to replace something positive by something negative, to exchange an idealism that is at least outgoing by a cynicism that hides the wound we have inflicted. This is a technique in education no more enlightened than was that of blood-letting in mediaeval surgery – the result of both is debilitation.

Once again the teacher has to beware, above all, of that 'interference' which, in Buber's phrase already quoted, 'divides the soul in his care into an obedient and a rebellious part'. It was interference of this kind which prompted the children's criticisms quoted in the Newsom Report:

Our current affairs lesson was horrible We had to sit and listen to the teacher preach about what she believed.

What with politics and ban the bomb English lessons were right crummy.²

Because of the danger of preaching and interference, one needs to treat with some distrust statements such as Bantock's:

We must be prepared actively to combat and demonstrate – for example, in the analysis of newspapers we can try to show the falsity of advertisements (with their links with the domestic life) so that the children become used to asking qualitative questions in relation to the concrete things they all see and use; . . .³

One may be in sympathy, as I am in this case, with the author's general thesis, but words like 'combat' and 'demonstrate' must be used with care in this context. It is, of course, possible to combat abuses indirectly, and to demonstrate in such a way that there is no imposition of the teacher's own viewpoint, but the transition to an authoritarian standpoint is fatally easy. Moreover, these words themselves tend to distract attention from the primary aim – that generation of mutual confidence between teacher and pupil which is an essential condition of meaningful work in this sphere, as it was in that dealt with in the last chapter. The following passage on television seems to me much better orientated, in its suggestion of the basic approach to any of the mass media and in its admirable stress on the establishment of 'common ground':

Television is a powerful and inspiring medium, but a very difficult one for

¹ Witness, for example, the implicit contradiction in the common, defensive remark, 'I don't care', so often uttered in a voice charged with a depth of feeling that gives the lie to the actual words.

² *Half Our Future*, H.M.S.O., p. 73.

³ *Education in an Industrial Society*, Faber, p. 216.

children to discuss objectively. Too many of them are passive habitual viewers, lacking the chance to discuss the merits of what they see; they have developed set attitudes and react strongly to any criticism of their favourite programme. As a first step, then, the teacher needs to establish common ground, to show that certain programmes attract and interest people of the most varied tastes and backgrounds. In fact we believe that television has given artists a new opportunity to develop a common culture that crosses the barriers of social class and formal education. But equally it has encouraged a spate of trivial, repetitive features, some of them of dubious effect, others actively dangerous. If the teacher can gain a fair hearing for various points of view, he may give the process of discrimination and critical awareness a chance to develop.¹



Before attempting to consider specifically the application of mass media to the classroom situation, it may be as well to look a little more closely at the background of social criticism against which such work needs to be set. Though I have made some reference to a 'new' awareness of dangers implicit in our society, such an awareness can of course only be said to be new in so far as it is directed towards particular problems that have not previously arisen. The tradition of social and cultural criticism, of which such awareness is a part, goes back as far as Swift – and beyond; one needs only to read such a book as Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society*² in order to realise how consistent and extensive such criticism has been over the past hundred and fifty years or more. The sheer volume of this criticism – coupled with the fact that much of it finds its most characteristically English expression in the novel rather than in works of criticism³ – would render fatuous any attempt to summarise it here. All I can hope to do is to indicate by a single quotation something of the general tendency of such criticism. Admittedly, the author of the passage which follows was approaching the subject from a particular and perhaps untypical angle,⁴ but the general lines of his indictment seem to me to run parallel to those of a host of critics, and the expression is strikingly eloquent:

¹ From the book of *Teacher's Notes to the English course Reflections*, by Simon Clements, John Dixon and Leslie Stratta, Oxford University Press, 1963. This is one of the few entirely excellent textbooks available and it is also particularly relevant to the subjects dealt with in this chapter; the reader is urged to refer to it as an invaluable source of detailed suggestions and as an example of a singularly humane and constructive approach.

² I make no apology for frequent references to this book; in the present context, especially, it seems to me essential background reading for any English specialist.

³ Though such writers as Arnold, Tawney, Leavis and Williams are intensely important, they appear to me less significantly English than, for example, Dickens, Lawrence, Huxley, Orwell and Golding.

⁴ Namely 'Love and its disintegration in contemporary Western society'. The passage quoted is from Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*, p. 63, in the edition published by Unwin Books.

Modern capitalism needs men who co-operate smoothly and in large numbers; who want to consume more and more; and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated. It needs men who feel free and independent, not subject to any authority, or principle or conscience – yet willing to be commanded, to do what is expected of them, to fit into the social machine without friction; who can be guided without force, led without leaders, prompted without aim – except the one to make good, to be on the move, to function, to go ahead.

What is the outcome? Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions. Human relations are essentially those of alienated automatons, each basing his security on staying close to the herd, and not being different in thought, feeling or action. While everybody tries to be as close as possible to the rest, everybody remains utterly alone, pervaded by the deep sense of insecurity, anxiety and guilt which always results when human separateness cannot be overcome. Our civilisation offers many palliatives which help people to be consciously unaware of this aloneness: first of all the strict routine of bureaucratized mechanical work, which helps people to remain unaware of their most fundamental human desires, of the longing for transcendence and unity. Inasmuch as the routine alone does not succeed in this, man overcomes his unconscious despair by the routine of amusement, the passive consumption of sounds and sights offered by the amusement industry; furthermore by the satisfaction of buying ever new things, and soon exchanging them for others. Modern man is actually close to the picture Huxley described in his *Brave New World*: well fed, well clad, satisfied sexually, yet without self, without any except the most superficial contact with his fellow men, guided by the slogans which Huxley formulated so succinctly, such as: 'When the individual feels, the community reels'; or 'Never put off till tomorrow the fun you can have today', or, as the crowning statement: 'Everybody is happy nowadays'. Man's happiness today consists in 'having fun'. Having fun lies in the satisfaction of consuming and 'taking in' commodities, sights, food, drinks, cigarettes, people, lectures, books, movies – all are consumed, swallowed. The world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big bottle, a big breast; we are the sucklers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones – and the eternally disappointed ones. Our character is geared to exchange and to receive, to barter and to consume; everything, spiritual as well as material objects, becomes an object of exchange and of consumption.

Of those writers whose analysis of society has been more particularly concerned with the impact of mass media, the name of Richard Hoggart will spring most readily to mind. Quite apart from the sheer readability of *The Uses of Literacy*, the book is intensely relevant to work in the classroom. Whether or not he accepts all the author's conclusions, the teacher finds here a survey of the whole field that cannot but suggest a host of possible applications¹ in his day-to-day teaching. It will be particularly useful for those who are dealing with children from an industrial, working-class area, but its relevance is much wider

¹ Some specific points will be raised later on.

than this, since the impact of the mass media is not confined to particular areas or classes of society.



I have repeatedly emphasised that the choice of the subject matter of English lessons must depend upon the teacher's assessment, not so much of its intrinsic importance, as of its relevance to the characteristic needs and abilities of particular groups of children. Thus classwork on the mass media – since it involves some fairly sophisticated critical techniques – is best deferred until the pupils' use of language is becoming more conscious, and until they have become aware, in a more adult way, of the world in which they live. Ideally, the work should be left until the fourth and fifth years, though a start may sometimes be made in the third year. I realise that newspaper work is quite often attempted earlier than this – and would concede that it may be fruitful and enjoyable – but I cannot help feeling that it is a pity to 'jump the gun' in this way. What is undertaken with some success in the early years might be a much more valid enterprise a couple of years later, and a superficial attempt at too early a stage will impede and deprive of its potential impact any fuller treatment undertaken when the pupils are really ready for it.

There is everything to be said for beginning our intensive study of mass media by a consideration of advertisements. It is perhaps the easiest aspect to illustrate convincingly and, though it must ultimately lead to an examination of newspapers, films and television, it can form a coherent and relatively self-contained subject for study over a period of some weeks. Children often enjoy collecting the necessary material and arranging it round the classroom – as must surely be done if they are to be stimulated visually before attempting to discuss the means and effects of such stimulation.¹

The most obvious relevance of advertising to the teaching of English lies in the part its study may play in the development of a sensitive and critical awareness of language. Thus it is very closely connected with much that has already been said about comprehension: the study of relatively crude emotive language may form an excellent introduction to its use in subtler forms. And the ability to recognise the emotive word is fundamental to the creation of some critical resistance.

Less obviously, learning to respond to emotive language is related

¹ The discussion of visual emphases in advertisement photographs and drawings links up naturally with earlier, or concurrent, exercises in descriptive technique, wherein selection and emphasis were shown to indicate the underlying intention or point of view. See especially Chapters 2 and 7, pp. 51-9 and pp. 150-2.

also the oral side of the subject – to the development of what I have called ‘the inner ear’. The significant emotionally charged words of an advertisement are arranged in ways that ensure they receive the desired emphasis. The devices adopted to achieve this are often readily recognisable, which for our purposes is all to the good. Of course this must be the case, if the advertiser’s message is to be obvious to the ‘masses’; not only, therefore, will he use crude and repetitive expressions like that poor, exhausted little word, *new*, but he will emphasise it by phrases like ‘Available for the first time!’ and, ‘Straight from our modern research laboratories’ – the modern equivalent, one concludes, of the horse’s mouth. As if this were not enough, capitals, underlining, exclamation marks and italics combine to make certain that not even the veriest cretin may miss the point. The pupil’s inner ear should enable him to resist these absurdities, simply because he has been trained to respond sensitively – thus such appeals may provoke from him the same reaction as if we were to bellow down an ear-trumpet into the ear of a man with very acute hearing: he would flinch, and so, we hope, will our pupil.

Here, of course, television commercials come to our aid. The most cursory study will suffice to establish that a precisely similar crudity is evident in the stereotyped intonation and expression of many announcers: the brisk, open-air-manly tone; the incisive voice of the go-getter; the pathetic twittering of the lost ingénue grappling ineffectually with problems of body-odour, dish-washing or dandruff; and perhaps most common of all, the husky, sex-impregnated tones of the cosmetic-worshipper.

I stress this aspect partly because it is too often neglected by approaches which exclusively emphasise response to the written word in advertisements, and partly because it opens up such a field for enjoyable experiment – experiment which, be it noted, has its impact on the understanding of the written as well as the spoken word. The opportunities for intensive work with a tape-recorder are virtually unlimited, and such is the youthful enjoyment of mockery that it tends to overcome inhibitions and to produce interesting and flexible vocal expression. Thus a shy, retiring girl, whose play-reading is pure monotony, may suddenly become vocally alive when faced with the exacting challenge to present a ‘sexy blurb’ for some unlikely product such as hob-nailed boots or castor oil. A further advantage of this type of exercise is that reading and writing are seen to be complementary: the writing demands the provision of suitable points of emphasis; the reading imposes the need for flexible and sensitive interpretation. In

class projects on advertisements there will always be children who excel in one aspect or the other but the general tendency, simply because it is fun, is for more and more children to participate actively in both.

Important though these may be, it is not possible – or, rather, not justifiable – to consider the linguistic features of advertisements in isolation. We must be concerned with content as well as style, simply because our interest embraces considerations of personality development in addition to aspects of language technique. Thus, whatever the book's limitations, the basic material of *The Hidden Persuaders* is relevant to our teaching. Just how far he will venture into the technical language of psychology must be left to the individual teacher, but he is bound to devote some time to the consideration of some of the more characteristic appeals.¹ The children must be made conscious of the way advertisers exploit certain human needs and instincts – I have already referred indirectly to the sexual element in advertisements; this is obviously meaningful to adolescents but so too is the need for social acceptance and approval. Consideration of the design of advertisements may thus illuminate many aspects of human behaviour: the 'brand image' and the association of ideas; rationalisation of instinctive desires – these are but two obvious examples.

Our aim in teaching the mass media is surely partly to create a resistance that will be not merely critical but also protective in its operation. To understand the technical devices of advertising may lead only to a shallow – as opposed to a healthy – cynicism. Properly designed teaching of the mass media goes much further than superficial analysis: entering the field of the adolescent's emotions in an unembarrassing and impersonal way, it seeks to promote thought about values and attitudes, for it is here – as the Newsom Report emphasises – that the influence of advertisements is most harmful, since least apparent. Once again, however, the method must be not one of preaching, or imposition, but of questioning which is designed to lead the pupils from the ostensible object of a particular advertisement to an appreciation of the hidden techniques of persuasion and manipulation. Even when he is dealing with specifically psychological ideas, the right kind of questioning should enable the teacher to draw nearly all the relevant observations from the pupils themselves.

No matter how profound the analysis, or how systematic the questioning, however, there remains the need for positive, creative

¹ The teaching of this at a more advanced level is referred to in my article 'Understanding One's Environment: English for the Science Sixth', in *The Use of English*, Autumn 1962, Vol. XIV, No. 1.

work. The fact that much of it must, in this particular context, be imitative seems unimportant as long as the imitation involves the enjoyable experimentation with language that I have constantly sought to advocate. Such writing, moreover, is the most constructive way of testing the extent to which the pupil has really understood – we may be sure that, if he shows some ability in employing the techniques himself, he has acquired an adequate critical insight. Very obviously, the less able pupils will be able to compose only crude imitations, but they enjoy it and should not be denied the opportunity merely because polish and subtlety are beyond them. With the more sophisticated, the work may go beyond mere imitation of particular types of advertisement, giving expression to a broader, critical awareness:

HAPPY FAMILIES

The typical family, as portrayed by many advertising agencies, is composed usually of four people; the parents and their teenage 'problem' daughter and a young son generally aged between ten and twelve.

The father of the family is a genial man in his late thirties. He usually tends to be tall, robust and have clear-cut features. The mother is nearly always dressed well (for housework) with freshly permed hair and an excellent complexion and somehow she always contrives to wear a serene, unruffled but motherly look on her face. The teenage daughter nearly always has a long pony-tail and round face. Lastly, the young son is a mischievous rascal with an innocent freckled face who always seems to get what he wants.

They are usually presented to us sitting round a large table. The sun is inevitably pouring its radiant rays through the large french window. Mother appears carrying an appetising, mouth-watering tin of soup, which the family all love, and everyone, looking fresh and spruce, proceeds to eat. Unfortunately, they never seem to finish, which is a pity as it is a sheer waste of good food.

During the day, after the father, like the average man, has driven off to work to his job in a factory in his cream limousine and best suit, we see the rest of the family lounging around the house. The daughter and some of her friends are clustered around a record-player, drinking coffee.

Perhaps the young boy will manage to fall down and cut himself; mother will invariably appear with an endless supply of bandages which immediately quell the pain.

Mother is usually found in a modern, splendidly equipped kitchen with venetian blinds, doing some household chore, wearing the expression of one who has all the troubles in the world. Alas! She cannot get her floor clean but fortune smiles upon her and in pops a friendly neighbour with some practised advice. In less than no time, her floor is scrupulously clean and mother is once more transformed into a smiling, contented woman.

Meanwhile the father, having his lunch-break, eats some sandwiches his wife has put up for him. His enthusiasm for these sandwiches is extremely warming – not many men, after all, would put up with margarine and, anyway, he usually has to give one away to some budding cook who seems to appear from nowhere. He is a lucky man in so much as his overall is absolutely dazzling; his wife cares for her family and it shows in the way she

washes her family's clothes. I hope she shows it in a more maternal way than by just choosing her washing powder carefully.

At night they all settle down to watch television but after a while the little boy has his warm nourishing drink and then he goes and sleeps more sweetly than ever before. Some time afterwards the daughter has her vitamin C drink. She has always had this. She was born in 1943 and her mother found it hard to know what to give her. Fortunately she had an uncle who was always popping in with advice and he told her mother about vitamin C. She, also, sleeps well, knowing that when she wakes up her mouth will soon become tingling fresh. Finally the mother and father prepare for bed. They both take their fortifying tablets that give them so much boundless energy. And so with all safely and soundly sleeping, we will leave this happy, perfect typical family and as we do so the gay, melodious little tune that has accompanied them wherever they've been fades into non-existence.

(Written by a fourth-year girl of sound grammar school ability)

The range of work that may arise from the study of newspapers is almost unlimited – description of various kinds, narrative, humorous, factual, argumentative and persuasive writing; interviews, eyewitness accounts and commentaries; class discussion and debate: these are merely some of the more obvious possibilities. Whatever is undertaken, however, the topicality of the newspaper demands imitation; by attempting to reproduce this essential feature, we are helped to ensure that whatever we do is relevant to the children's own interests, experience and background. Where belief in the project method is more than mere lip-service, and where the school organisation allows, current and specifically local topics of interest may open up a range of topographical, historical, industrial and social study that goes far beyond the limits of English, though each aspect may be related to it. This demands flexible time-tabling, and probably the active co-operation of several members of staff. One headmaster of my acquaintance encourages pairs or groups of children to investigate the locality, to carry out live interviews, and to report on events both trivial and significant occurring in the neighbourhood of the school.

Such whole-hearted applications enable the children to acquire a wide range of experience in both written and spoken expression about topics that mean something to them; more than this, the work also constitutes valuable training in social responsibility since the children are unobtrusively led to become involved in the community around them. Obviously, to allow pupils to operate in this way as news-scouts, interviewers and reporters is to give them a degree of freedom which some would consider too dangerous, but such acts of faith are, I think, generally justified by results and, in a sense, the only way to inculcate standards of responsible behaviour is to assume that the children will

behave responsibly. The pupils will need to be selected with some care,¹ of course (and perhaps the teachers also), but experiment along such lines as these seems to me vital, if we are to respond adequately to the advice of the Newsom Report:

As we see it, the school programme, in the last year especially, ought to be deliberately outgoing. This means taking the pupils mentally and often physically beyond the school walls. It also means bringing men and women from the world outside the walls into the school. It almost certainly demands a greater flexibility in the timetable and in methods of study. And it may require more time than is normally available inside the conventional school day.²

In the teaching of the less able, particularly those soon to leave school, the proper outside-orientation of the work as suggested here seems very important. It is by this standard that some of the project work undertaken on newspapers must often appear inadequate. The work tends to be superficial because it is based too exclusively on imitation, and insufficient attention is paid to the provision of subject-matter that may constitute a thoroughly meaningful context for the application of the technique to be imitated.³

I feel it necessary to underline, at the outset, the importance of projects, but my immediate concern is rather more limited: namely, the way in which the type of critical awareness involved in the study of advertisements may be further developed through work on newspapers. There is, however, one point of resemblance between projects and the approach I shall be describing: the children themselves do nearly all the work.

The first stage is simple – the collection of material. Children are asked to bring into class a variety of newspapers. Some of the most striking differences in approach and layout may be observed in Sunday newspapers, which may be brought into class the following Monday, but the dailies will provide plenty of material to work on – the essential thing is to have the full range of papers for one particular day. It is unlikely that the pupils will be able to produce a copy of every newspaper but preliminary enquiry by the teacher should indicate which papers he will need to obtain to complete the range.

¹ This is particularly necessary in the first attempts to work on these lines, but a tradition of such work, once established, will enable the teachers to allow more and more children to take part – as they will be eager to do.

² p. 72, para. 210.

³ This superficiality may be compared to that which frequently invalidates exercises in form-filling or letter-writing. It is often assumed that because young people will ultimately need some proficiency in these practical techniques, they must therefore realise the relevance of such work and that no further motivation is needed. In some cases this may be true, but much better work is generally produced if the forms filled in are real forms, and the letters are written to real people.

When each pupil (or, possibly, each pair) is provided with a paper to study, the second stage – of purely factual investigation – may begin. The pupils are now asked to consider such features of the papers in front of them as: main story; size of headings; amount of foreign news; number and type of advertisements, of short, personal news items, of photographs; editorial subjects; and so on. When the teacher has collected and tabulated their findings on the blackboard, certain broad differences and similarities should be fairly apparent.

The children must now be asked to account for some of these, and they will generally be able to suggest a reasonably accurate classification of the different types of paper. Their efforts to do this often shed interesting light upon their own cultural and social attitudes. The teacher is ill-advised to attack open prejudice directly, but should rather lead the pupils to closer, more accurate definition, by means of questions. It may well be suggested, for example, that *The Times* is 'for the nobs' – this is a good starting point for class discussion, but we hope to end up with a more objective classification. Throughout this preliminary investigation our aim is to arrive at an explanation of the differences between papers in terms of the types of reader to whom they appeal. In this we are on the way to establishing the connection between the writer's intention, and the tone and style he uses.¹

If we are to create any positive, critical resistance to the cruder appeals of mass media, we must develop in our pupils some understanding of the way in which language not only conveys factual information but also suggests the particular viewpoint of the writer.² In the course of their preliminary comparison of newspapers, the pupils will have noted at least some evident differences in attitude – many of these will be too glaring to miss. Thus when, following Mr Macmillan's resignation, the succession for the Tory leadership was in doubt, Lord Hailsham's decision to renounce his peerage was variously announced, as these two examples demonstrate. The *Daily Mail* said: 'HAILSHAM ACTS – "Sacrifice . . . I'll give up peerage"', while the *Daily Herald* announced: 'HAILSHAM GAMBLER – He throws in his title to bid for power.'

¹ This links up with more straightforward comprehension work – see footnote to p. 179.

² 'If one can begin at school to build up a realisation of the intimate connection between the personality of the individual and the language he uses, together with some awareness of the emotive power of words – and I am convinced that both are possible – one is laying invaluable foundations at once for the critical appreciation of literature and for the sort of resistance to propaganda in all its more and less insidious forms which any adequate English teaching today must attempt.' Mr M. K. Paffard, in the article on 'Free Writing' already quoted. (*The Use of English*, Vol. IX, No. 2.)

The consideration of such differences as these – following on naturally from the study of emotive appeals in advertisements – makes clear how much depends on the writer's point of view. In driving this simple lesson home I have often used some of the illustrative material in the chapter on 'Emotional Meanings' in R. H. Thouless' *Straight and Crooked Thinking* (E.U.P.), particularly the following:

There is a well-known saying that the word 'firm' can be declined as follows: I am *firm*, thou art *obstinate*, he is *pig-headed*. . . .

'Firm', 'obstinate', and 'pig-headed' all have the same objective meaning – that is, following one's own course of action and refusing to be influenced by other people's opinions. They have, however, different emotional meanings; 'firm' has an emotional meaning of strong approval, 'obstinate' of mild disapproval, 'pig-headed' of strong disapproval.

Many teachers will enjoy collecting a stock of their own favourite examples of emotive writing and these are very useful in class. Emergent countries seem to have a particular need of emotive words – in itself a fact worth discussing in class – as we may gather from this description by a Ghanaian paper of those who had failed to vote in the referendum early in 1964:

. . . an infinitesimal minority of misguided subversionists, confusionists and self-seeking neo-colonialist robots, whose warped mentality has been poisoned by the serpentine fangs of overambitious and power-seeking Judases who have sold their conscience for a capitalist-imperialist mess of postage. [sic.]¹

A few illustrations of this type will enable the pupils to return to their study of newspapers ready to search out more significant differences than their first examination brought to light. They need now to consider which papers use more obviously emotive language in their headings and in their editorial comment. More detailed work may be undertaken on specific types of article in order to assess, even in a fairly crude way, the proportion of factual to emotional material: What happened? What does the *writer* feel about it? How does he want *us* to feel about it? Which are the emotive words? It may soon be possible to arrive at more important conclusions about the types of subject which seem most often to be emotionally reported. The class may then be asked to consider what this tells us about the subjects themselves.

So much for the analysis; once again something more is needed, however. I have already stressed, in general terms, the range of creative 'newspaper' work that is possible, but in this particular context – as

¹ Quoted in the *Guardian*, February 3rd, 1964. The spelling is particularly interesting – perhaps the result of the writer's passion. (There is of course the more prosaic possibility that it is merely an error in type-setting.)

with advertisements – my own emphasis would be upon the application to their own writing of the techniques already analysed. I would seek to give them practice in objective, as opposed to subjective, writing; and in writing emotional accounts of the same events from conflicting viewpoints. In work of this kind, ability will obviously be a limiting factor, but even children of average ability should be able to attempt an account of, for instance, a quarrel between two neighbours from each point of view in turn, or a description of a decisive win in a football match as it appeared to the supporters of the victors, and to those of the vanquished. With the most able children it may be possible also to explore other related techniques employed by journalists – irony, ridicule, and exaggeration.¹



The significance of television is widely recognised. The Newsom Report argues that when most pupils of average or below-average ability have left school, television will constitute for them:

the most important source of knowledge about the world outside the confines of their own experience; of enjoyment of the arts; of acquaintance with the full range of human personality, and of contact with ways of speaking and thinking other than those of their own social group. . . .²

Its plea that 'teachers should reckon with these facts' is made more urgent by the evident conviction that present efforts are inadequate, a point of view that is supported by the discovery, in a recent survey, that 'there were only 5,000 television sets in schools as compared with 30,000 sound radio sets'.³

If the imaginative treatment of the newspaper offers many opportunities for meaningful creative and critical activity, the range opened up by a similar classroom approach to television is even wider. There are, for example, many possible ways of relating its study to work on reading and literature. In view of this great field of opportunity, to devote a whole term in the fourth or fifth year to the consideration of various aspects of the medium would seem no more than a realistic recognition of its importance. The aims of such work are implicit in the quotation above and indeed in the whole of the chapter on 'Going

¹ There are a number of textbooks that contain good exercises of the kinds described above – for example:

Denys Thompson: *Practice in Reading*, Chatto and Windus. *Understanding and Enjoyment*, Book III, Oxford University Press, and E. L. Black and A. H. Lawley: *Exercises in Précis and Comprehension*, University of London Press. This last also contains some useful material on the Press.

² pp. 73-4.

³ *Ibid.*

out into the World': 'to lift the pupils' eyes beyond the local horizon', 'to extend their knowledge', 'to enlarge their sympathies', to 'serve as a basis for discussion'. The report stresses that the opportunities offered under this last heading may be all the more effective because 'it is an experience shared with the teacher, and not immune from criticism'. This significantly reinforces the argument about the need for 'common ground' which I quoted earlier.

Such stress on the enlargement of knowledge, the broadening of sympathy, the exploration of the real world – all this is very clearly relevant to aspects of English discussed in the first section of this book. My specific concern here, however, is with the part the work may play in the development of critical awareness and discrimination. The Newsom Report also lays some emphasis on this:

... not only through television, but in a very large field of popular culture – music, films, theatre, journalism – pupils can learn, with guidance, to sharpen their perceptions. In this way they not only widen their range of interests, but are helped to take a more intelligently critical view of what is available. *Exercising their own judgement on experiences well within their comprehension is an important piece of general training for our pupils.*¹

The topic of 'selective' or 'critical viewing' has, of course, been frequently discussed by speakers of all kinds. The stress they have laid upon selectiveness has not always been helpful, however, particularly in the case of the adolescent viewer. I imagine that the most unselective viewers are to be found among the parents, rather than their offspring. Many adolescents are in fact already highly selective – in one sense – but their selectiveness is a reflection of limited and stereotyped attitudes, not of that discrimination which we would wish to encourage. The problems here are very close to those of reading, already discussed at length in the previous chapter: the training in discrimination must first be based on inclusion, rather than exclusion; we must extend taste, not limit it. Everything that I have said about whetting the appetite, about the extension of the range of possible enjoyment, is intensely relevant in this context also.

It cannot be too much stressed that in the discussion of programmes there is no 'authority' present. We can only gain a hearing if everyone can do so. Opportunity to extend the children's receptivity will first come through the expression, not of our views, but of those of that divergent minority which we may hope to find in every class and which, unwittingly, may be our secret weapon. The tradition that everyone has a right to be heard enables the relatively odd or eccentric pupils to defend their unusual preferences, and we trust that the class

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 74, para. 217. (The italics are mine.)

will occasionally recognise that the only way to discuss their preferences properly is for everyone to look at specific programmes.

The climate of confidence engendered by a period of scrupulously fair give and take will ultimately enable the teacher to express his own views. Before very long there may be cries of – ‘Well, what does “Sir” think?’ Here care is needed, for we must not pick up the mantle of authority. The first point of attack seems to me not to suggest programmes which they won’t normally watch, but to extend their appreciation of those that they do. Thus ‘Z-cars’ is likely to be popular but many will not have really considered why – apart from its obvious excitement – this is so. By choosing something that is popular as well as good, the teacher reinforces the common ground and ensures a good reception for the beginning of a more technical appreciation than the pupils’ normal one. Sometimes, through concentrating on the less obvious aspects of a popular favourite, he may significantly widen their taste and render the programme even more enjoyable; he might, for example, draw their attention to the importance of the minor characters in ‘Z-cars’ – the seedy professional ‘nark’, the arrogant businessman, the punch-drunk boxer. By leading them to look more closely at these cameos, excellent as they often are, the teacher can guide the pupils towards a deeper and fuller perception. They may now be interested enough to look at a documentary, for example, which they would normally have switched off automatically.

The practical difficulties that beset the teacher when he attempts to ensure that all the class watch any programme that is outside the usual run, are considerable. If the fathers and mothers prove absolutely intractable in their determination not to miss their favourite programme, there is little that can be done. Most often a compromise may be reached, particularly if the children have a programme officially ‘set’ for homework. An enormous amount may be achieved, however, without departing from popular taste at all and the teacher needs to remember this.

★

I have hitherto been concerned with the need for building in the child critical faculties that may enable him to resist some of the pressures exerted by the mass media. Though – for purposes of emphasis in this particular context – I have sought to do so, it is not possible to isolate the critical faculty from others more positive in their operation. By itself, critical judgment is an inadequate protection; it may also constitute a positive danger, as Raymond Williams has pointed out:

The basic intellectual fault of such formulations as that in *Culture and Environment* is, curiously, the taking of aspects for wholes. A valid detailed judgement grows too quickly into a persuasive outline. The tendency to reduce experience to literary evidence alone is commonly tempting. *Middle-town* is a frightening book; many advertisements and many newspapers are cheap and nasty. But do we not too easily construct from such evidence a contemptuous version of the lives of our contemporaries, which we should be hard put to it to prove from life, although we could prove it easily enough, or so it would seem, from print? . . .¹

In our attempts to avoid tabloid-thinking and to create resistance to manipulation, we may risk succumbing to a subtler, but nonetheless inaccurate and inadequate mode of thought. A superficial consideration of the misuse of language in press or television may be merely an opiate, creating a comfortable, shallow cynicism, or a mere linguistic expertise, rather than any deeper awareness of human life and values. We have always to remember that the term 'mass media' is itself a convenient but misleading over-simplification:

There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses. In an urban industrial society there are many opportunities for such ways of seeing. The point is not to reiterate the objective conditions but to consider, personally and collectively, what these have done to our thinking. The fact is, surely, that a way of seeing other people which has become characteristic of our kind of society, has been capitalized for the purposes of political or cultural exploitation. What we see, neutrally, is other people, many others, people unknown to us. In practice, we mass them, and interpret them, according to some convenient formula. Within its terms, the formula will hold. Yet it is the formula, not the mass, which it is our real business to examine. It may help us to do this if we remember that we ourselves are all the time being massed by others. To the degree that we find the formula inadequate for ourselves, we can wish to extend to others the courtesy of acknowledging the unknown.²

For our 'critical resistance' to be anything worth inculcating, it needs to provide means of strengthening and deepening insight through the examination of positive values. There must be opportunity in the class, not only for enjoyable technical and creative experiment in writing, but also for creative thought about those attitudes and values most susceptible to the influence of mass media. The purpose of the 'qualitative questions' which the Newsom Report suggests we must train children to ask is not merely to note what is inferior, but to obtain a clearer understanding of those standards by which we assert its inferiority. Moreover, if it was important for children to realise the difficulty of finding adequate language to convey an experience, it must also be important for them to assess and examine language that attempts to convey abstract ideas, ideals and values.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 260. (Speaking of F. R. Leavis.)

² R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

In *The Uses of Literacy*, after commenting upon the inadequacy of popular assumptions about concepts such as freedom, equality and progress, Richard Hoggart concludes the chapter with a list of adjectives commonly used in newspaper editorials, and indicating – as he puts it – the virtues and vices in the new canon. For the vices:

pharisaical; timid; dull; equivocal; snobbish; canting; mealy-mouthed; conventional; hypocritical; ponderous; pompous; humbugging; official; and, of course, boring.

These are the fourteen Deadly Sins of the old gang; and how alike they all are. For the virtues:

new; different; unorthodox; frank; cheeky; outspoken; wide-awake; live; vigorous; zestful; vivid; gay; lusty; enterprising; ebullient; crusading; 'urchin grin'; candid; audacious; youthful; sincere.

Here the basis seems to be the adolescent-against-the-teachers code, a school-boy's callow bluntness.¹

These might form an admirable basis for introductory work on emotive language. They must also be a vehicle for the deeper understanding of human behaviour: our concern with linguistic technique must spring from a desire to show the capacity of language to hide or to distort the truth. We need to examine the favourable and unfavourable emotional meanings of, for instance, *sincere* and *hypocritical*; we need also to think about the fundamental arrogance – the presumption of the judgment – that their use generally implies.

Thoroughly abstract concepts such as freedom, equality and progress are unpromising subjects for discussion with any but the most able children. They may, however, be approached indirectly – either through the consideration of words such as those in Hoggart's list or, more obviously, through topics and events of immediate and specific interest. In our teaching of the mass media we must find time for the discussion of certain broad areas of human experience and behaviour – topics that may often be raised by particular articles or programmes dealing with aspects of, for example: war, sex, crime, parenthood, the colour-bar and authority.

It may be worth while to consider one of these – the last – a little more closely, since it raises problems that concern both the adolescent and the teacher.



In *The Uses of Literacy* Hoggart has a chapter on attitudes to authority among the working class in which he particularly stresses the division of people into 'them' and 'us'. This kind of attitude must be expected in any close-knit section of a community, I suppose, but it seems worth

¹ *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin Books, p. 168.

recalling because it is not only a symptom of divisions in our own society but of a mental outlook which it is in some part the duty of the English teacher to combat.

This outlook is found among both parents and children of medium or low intelligence. Most headmasters must have had the impression, when dealing with complaining parents, of an immense gulf fixed between teacher and parent – an obstinate, wooden-willed incapacity to see the other side of the picture. As for the children, we have only to consider the publicity given to various aspects of adolescent ‘rebellion against authority’ to realise how generally this is accepted as an inevitable feature of life today.

Yet is it really inevitable? We have frequently, and rightly, been reminded that the attention of a sensation-loving press has been directed to extreme manifestations of impulses which, though controlled, are present in most healthy young adolescents. To that extent, then, we may say rebellion is inevitable – even desirable.

Side by side with such healthy symptoms, however, and obscured by hypnotising press accounts of outright delinquency, there exists another kind of feeling against authority – duller, unsensational, unaggressive but widespread and immensely significant. This feeling is not hard to find amongst the weaker forms in the third and fourth years, and above all, in non-academic ‘leavers sets’. If one can get them to speak freely, it will be clearly found in their attitude to policemen and also – though complicated here by a variety of other assumptions about morality and values – to the clergy. The generalised resentments of fourth-year leavers, for example, have seemed to me to reflect two major conditioning factors: in the first place, the unimaginative, non-reciprocal nature of the parental authority to which they have been accustomed, and in the second place, the authoritarian nature of school organisation. In most cases an additional and extremely potent factor has been the children’s lack of intelligence and imagination.

It seems to me that, as English teachers – and being therefore as intimately concerned with personality-development as with punctuation and spelling – we have here a feature of outlook that is most unfortunate in its results and need not be accepted as an inevitable concomitant of adolescence. Some effort can and must be made to counter it. But how?

I have consistently urged the abandonment of purely authoritarian attitudes in English teaching, in relation to both the subject itself and also, by implication, to the discipline of the class. At no point, however, do a flexible discipline and reciprocal teacher-pupil relationship appear

more essential than with children entering this difficult stage.¹ A good classroom atmosphere is vital if a genuine interchange of ideas is to be feasible at this time, when oral expression ought to be the very foundation of the course. If the teacher has to initiate a major change in the classroom atmosphere – following perhaps three years of more formal discipline – his task will not be easy. Patience, tact and sympathy – together with an underlying firmness – all these will be required. Patience and sympathy will be particularly necessary where there has been a change, for the adolescent will be suspicious, finding it difficult to believe in; whatever the situation, tact will be needed since the pupils – with their characteristic tendency to argue from the particular to the general, from a reference to one, disliked, teacher to a generalisation about all teachers – will be liable to introduce personal judgments of a kind which the teacher is professionally bound vigorously to discourage. But this last difficulty must not be allowed to frighten us.

Again, I have referred elsewhere to the rôle of the imagination in the development of morality. This is the second essential. As I suggested, a determining factor in the development of a vague resentment into a fixed attitude is the lack of intelligence and imagination – the lack of the first we can do nothing about, but that is not true of the second deficiency. I am confident that it is possible to train the imagination of even dull children in such a way as to broaden their sympathy with other people, even with people whom their experience has so far led them to dislike. It should be noted that we are not expecting them to *like* everybody but merely to see a little of the other person's point of view. They are likely to attain this much less successfully by the use of intellect than by the use of imagination. Thus those comprehension questions – 'How did the mother feel when her son was caught stealing?' etc. have a real relevance.²

To develop insight of this kind in the children's earlier years, I have advocated a variety of exercises, using oral comprehension as well as imaginative composition. When the children are about to leave us, however, because the time is short and their past successes in the latter exercises may be limited, it may be a good idea to concentrate our attack on a limited front. The whole question of authority should be an important aspect of oral work with all weak fourth-year sets. If there are suppressed resentments, let some at least be brought into the open. Most embarrassing personal references can be avoided provided the teacher, having gained in some measure the confidence of the class,

¹ The raising of the school-leaving age makes the problem even more urgent.

² The link, here, with the stress on empathy in Chapters 3 and 8 should be obvious.

explains his own position and how these references are embarrassing to him.

But where to begin with unimaginative and unintelligent children on a subject so vast? The obvious point of attack, it seems to me, lies in that field of personal experience that is most real to them: at home and in school. Perhaps the latter is best. Here what is needed is frank discussion of all aspects of school rules, etc., and of the life and feelings of a teacher. While some teachers will be able to do this by drawing on their own feelings and experience, many may prefer something less personal but yet real. It seems to me that an admirable source of such experience exists ready to hand – Edward Blishen's *The Roaring Boys*. Here is a book which (or at least parts of which) would be found entertaining by all but the most dim. After this has been dealt with in some detail it should be possible to deal with the application of some of the lessons learnt to their attitudes to various other types of adult authority, as well as to questions of discipline in the home.¹



Whatever the teacher's attitude to authority and class discipline, however, my reference to Edward Blishen's book points the value of supplementing the work on the mass media by some study of literature. If our attack is to be on inadequate attitudes to and modes of thought about human behaviour, rather than a course in mere linguistic analysis, our attention must constantly be focused on people and their problems. Many aspects of mass media help us in this direction, but our efforts are made much more effective when such work involves cross-reference to the treatment of related problems of values and human behaviour in literature. Indeed, the whole range of work in English that I have tried to outline is an attempt to ensure that fewer pupils who pass through our hands will be like the man described in Tessimond's poem:

THE MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT

I am the unnoticed, the unnoticeable man:
The man who sat on your right in the morning train:
The man you looked through like a windowpane:
The man who was the colour of the carriage, the colour of the mounting
Morning pipe-smoke.

I am the man too busy with a living to live,
Too hurried and worried to see and smell and touch:
The man who is patient too long and obeys too much
And wishes too softly and seldom.

¹ With reference to this, some teachers may find B. M. Spinley's *The Deprived and the Privileged* a very suggestive background source – as I have.

I am the man they call the nation's backbone,
Who am boneless – playable, catgut, pliable clay:
The man they label 'Little' lest one day
I dare to grow.

I am the rails on which the moment passes,
The megaphone for many words and voices:
I am graph, diagram,
Composite face.

I am the led, the easily-fed,
The tool, the not-quite-fool,
The would-be-safe-and-sound,
The uncomplaining, bound,
The dust fine-ground,
Stone-for-a-statue waveworn pebble-round.

*A. S. J. Tessimond*¹

¹ From *Voices in a Giant City*, Heinemann.

10—Critical Discipline: Methods and Criteria of Evaluation

Preoccupied by counting scores, children may never come to see why they should learn unselfishness or history or mathematics . . . unless externally imposed discipline really in fact prepares the way for intrinsic self-discipline, it cannot really be justified.

Louis Arnaud Reid, *Philosophy and Education*¹

What I want is a schooling that will enable these children [the less able] to realise their natures as much as in their own way our able children realise theirs through intellectual accomplishment. This means that there is within the work proposed a discipline and a demand on the self no less exacting at its level than that involved in high academic work; but one more suited to the sorts of sensitivities and level of consciousness traditionally revealed by the folk.

G. H. Bantock, *Education in an Industrial Society*²

Progress in education tends to be an unequal process and genuine movements towards greater enlightenment, though they may be evocative of 'sweetness and light', also bring attendant abuses. Often, before any significant progress may be achieved, there has to be deliberate rejection of what has gone before, but such rejection must be critical – it is not sufficient to reject something merely because it is 'out-of-date', as popular commercial pressures now continually impel us to do. Thus the initial and necessary rejection may need to be followed by a period of stabilisation, during which the new approach is strengthened and made more flexible by the objective assessment and, in some cases, subsequent incorporation of selected features of the earlier approach.

A good example of this, and one more closely related to the content of this chapter than might at first appear, was the impact, in the 1920s, of the new psychology upon the theory and practice of the child's upbringing. The beliefs which activated the exponents of 'free-expression' and non-authoritarian techniques were generally laudable and truly enlightened, but the rejection of authority and discipline wa

¹ Heinemann, p. 134.

² Faber, p. 221.

often so complete as to be positively conducive to the development in the child of an insecurity which they were seeking expressly to avoid, and which was in some cases as harmful in its effects as the worst features of the authoritarian school.

More recently, somewhat analogous developments have been taking place in the more limited field of English teaching. On the one hand, there has been a notable growth of enlightenment as testified by the greatly increased emphasis on 'creative work'; on the other hand, one feels that the rejection of authority, and standards, has been insufficiently critical. Thus a certain kind of what I would term 'therapeutic free-writing' has achieved considerable prominence. That in particular situations and with particular children this technique is valuable can hardly be contested, but assertions about its value have in some cases been so sweeping as to amount to a contention that this is the core of English.¹

Even where the 'pseudo-psychoanalytic' method of English teaching is not favoured, a new stress on creative work has sometimes led to the wholesale jettisoning of traditional methods and criteria and has, in consequence, created some insecurity in both child and teacher. The latter's insecurity may be deduced from sporadic reactions – spells of insistence upon greater correctness, etc., corrective training undertaken primarily because of an underlying unease, a fear that what he is doing in class is not, basically, serious enough.² Partly, perhaps, because of the influence of parental pressures, the child himself may be uneasy: while he will enjoy creative work, he may also wonder what progress he is making – should he really be enjoying himself all the time?

One needs to be uncompromising about this guilt-feeling and to demonstrate that work and pleasure are not irreconcilable. Nevertheless, the viability of a creatively orientated scheme of work must depend partly upon the removal of these sources of insecurity in teacher and child. This can be achieved if English is made a meaningful discipline. As Reid points out,³ the discipline must not, however, be merely external, but autonomous; as Bantock⁴ emphasises, it must be exacting.

¹ The neurotic or emotionally unbalanced child may find in this a necessary safety-valve for the release of tension; further, since most of us have our neurotic moments, the normal child may occasionally be expected to use his English work as an outlet in this way. What is really debatable is the *centrality* of this activity with relatively normal children. It would be my contention that most teachers are in no position to evaluate such material and should be discouraged from the attempt.

² The same assumptions were visible in the attitude of a parent who complained to his grammar school teacher that his son was 'enjoying English' and he should be made to do more *hard* work.

³ *Vide supra*, p. 215.

⁴ *Vide supra*, p. 215.

Part of the purpose of this section of the book has been to indicate ways in which aspects of 'technical' training of the more traditional kind may be purposefully integrated into a frame of work based on the imagination and the sensibilities of the child. Where such an integration is effective, these techniques, so far from cramping or inhibiting, appear to offer the child a very necessary series of specific challenges, and enable him to extend – and to enjoy extending – his conscious control of language. While I would agree with Bantock¹ that the stress on rational techniques is often largely out of place in the education of average children, I would extend his argument about the desirability of 'affective' education to apply to the able child, who also may very profitably develop his sensibilities. Obviously, part of the teacher's task will be to gauge the extent to which an appeal to the rational faculty, and the challenges offered by technical skills, are appropriate to a particular teaching situation, but whether the child be dull or able one's central focus may be the same – the exploration of real experience.

In more specific terms, the purpose of this chapter is to assert the need for a discipline which can be exacting and yet autonomous, and to examine some of the criteria that the teacher may adopt. This will inevitably involve some recapitulation of ideas mentioned in other chapters, but its primary function will be to do away with the insecurity that leads to occasional reliance on unenlightened textbook material,² and to face very squarely the question raised in the evaluation of creative work – if one doesn't look for correctness, what does one look for?

*

It is not the competition or the acknowledgment of inequality as such which is bad, but the making of these inequalities into a main standard of human assessment.³

L. A. Reid

It seems very significant that most marking should be done in *red* ink. 'Stop', 'Keep Out', 'Private', 'Danger' – the association of red with the infringement of rules is pretty firmly established, for a start. Then again the connection of this colour with irascibility is interesting, so that one imagines that the teacher who writes rude, indecipherable and often irrelevant comments on his pupils' essays does so in red ink because this more adequately expresses his ire at the violation of his dearest canons –

¹ See his chapter on 'The Education of the Less Able Child', *op. cit.*

² Which, be it noted, is not the same as doing away with occasional use of textbooks.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

one is tempted to speculate further, and to suppose that his comments are largely illegible simply because his anger at the misuse of a participial phrase has made his hand shake.

Reid mentions children 'preoccupied by counting scores', a feature of their behaviour which has sometimes been adduced as proof of the inherent naturalness of the 'competitive spirit', but which in reality is merely a reflection of the lamentable conditioning they have undergone. If children are occasionally preoccupied with marks, many teachers appear obsessed by them. On a recent visit to a grammar school of notable standing, I observed the staff solemnly engaged in filling in 'fortnightly mark-sheets' for each form; as far as I could gather, the main result of this inane exercise was that the most unsatisfactory performers were put on 'special report' to each teacher. In this one sees again the confusion of the relative importance of diagnosis and treatment. It may be argued that the above example is an extreme one. This is, I hope, true; but we should beware of assuming that it is untypical – many similar schools run a monthly stock-taking operation of this type, and of course termly assessments are almost universal practice.

I have already suggested that progress is an unequal business and here is a case in point: the spread of enlightenment appears to have left the problem of marking untouched. Buber, speaking of the 'old' educator – as opposed to his modern counterpart – points out that he was 'the bearer of assured values which were strong in tradition' and the same assumption is quite commonly made even today. Thus we have the perpetuation in marking of the idea of the teacher as an 'authority', one who is concerned with the maintenance of standards. To 'get behind with one's marking' is to be beset by a professional guilt-feeling, as if one had failed in one's primary task, whereas a failure to prepare one's lesson is a rather amiable and excusable peccadillo.

The preoccupation with correctness, with the manipulation of skills, is encouraged by the majority of textbooks. Quite apart from containing nonsensical exercises in the correction of common errors, these generally make the assumption that if the child is to be at school for five years, one-fifth of the technique should be covered each year, plus revision of course. To outline the other features of textbooks which have had a noxious effect upon the concept of marking would be tedious, particularly as nearly all of these may be inferred from the admirable parody by Mr A. D. Winterburn in an article in *The Use of English*.¹ This covers the whole subject with such entertaining economy that I cannot resist quoting it in full:

¹ Summer 1962, Vol. XIII, No. 4, 'I Write a Text Book' by A. D. Winterburn.

I WRITE A TEXTBOOK

Thou writest a textbook. He, she, or it writes a textbook. Do they (m. or f.) write textbooks?

'Yes, we write, or are writing, them.'

*

In this book (or, these books) are many chapters. Each chapter contains many exercises. Here is an exercise about the analysis of a simple sentence. The boy hates simple sentences. The boy writes the first example in his book. It contains a subject, a verb, a direct object, and an extension-of-the-predicate-labelled-'place'. No direct object is included in the sixth sentence. The boy writes down the extension-of-subject in the 'object' column. Look at sentence number nine! The boy puts 'nine' under 'subject'. The boy is learning (or, learns) his grammar.

Here is another chapter. This chapter is about complex sentences. Here is another chapter, which is about complex sentences. The boy will combine short sentences. He will form complex sentences. He will form these when he combines the short sentences. The boy will combine short sentences which, when he has combined them, will form complex sentences. That he should have to do this is perhaps surprising. He has to do this in order that he may learn more grammar. When he has done this, he will have learnt more grammar. If he had not done this, he would have been little the worse.

Now we come to another chapter, which deals with reported speech. The speaker said that then they came to another chapter, which dealt with reported speech. Let them show him the way to go home. He was tired and he wanted to go to bed. He had had a little drink about an hour previously, and it had gone right to his head. Wherever he might roam, whether it were on land, on sea, or on foam, they would always find him singing that song, namely, that they should show him the way to go home. Rewrite this in direct speech. The writer of the textbook told the boy to rewrite that in direct speech. The boy wishes he could tell the writer of the textbook (N.B. indirect object) a thing or two.

In the next chapter one will find some Common Errors if he looks for them. He need not look hard, due to them not having hitherto tempted him. He has not yet had to sell an old lady with carved legs, or her piano. Writing about 'Dogs', or 'My favourite hobby', or 'Honesty is the best policy', his essays may contain as many unattached participles or unrelated clauses, which in any case he takes little interest in, as if he had never had any practice (or practise?) in avoiding these mistakes.

The disease which makes him a common-error maker (or common error-maker?) is contagious, and he makes more in the contiguous chapter, on 'Words Easily Confused'. The only way in which he can be considered eligible for high marks is by being illegible; such an ingenuous trick can sometimes prove too ingenious for the genial master. And he will still, whilst essaying (v.) to write his essays (n.), regard 'to' and 'too' as interchangeable.

Next the lynx-eyed boy must pick out metaphors from the following sentences. The boy, whose eyes are like those of a lynx, has to state which, of the sentences that come after this one as scouts *follow* their leader, contain similes. Personification stalks before him; a lonely alliteration lingers, and leaves him; onomatopoeia, metonymy, pun, paradox, oxymoron - we know that 'tis a joyful trouble to him, and yet 'tis one.

*

Thou hast written a textbook. He, she, or it has written a textbook.

'Have we written textbooks?'

Ah, yes. Would that they (m. or f.) had never written textbooks. One should not put up with this kind of education, should he? No: this is the kind of education up with which they should not put.

The insidious influence of the bad textbook upon the marking methods of teachers would be hard to exaggerate. So far from viewing matter as more important than manner, the teacher frequently accepts the textbook's assumptions and devotes most of his time to the underlining, or ringing, or crossing out of errors. The aim of this exercise is presumably to encourage improvement, and yet how rarely is this aim achieved; how often are the same errors by the same pupils painstakingly indicated year after year. This is not because the teacher's comments are incorrect but because they are irrelevant – unsuited to the age or ability of the pupils in question; there is no attempt to motivate them to improve – no recognition that it is only to the rational and intellectual minority that an error represents a challenge.

sp I am Just starting my exam. there P
 sp is a look of hangate on P
 some faces. Others are Just P
 getting down to ~~fit~~ fit ~~everything~~ P. sp
 is ~~quite~~ Some people are sitting
 sp. P upright others are bending
 sp. P over the paper. but everybody sp
 sp his working hard ~~there's~~ a ~~side~~ of p. sp
 Depression as perhaps some-
 body comes across a stiff
 question. As the ~~minutes~~ minutes
 tick away the exam goes on P
 till the teacher tells
 sp. P ours to stop. Then their sp
 is a smile ^{some of} on the faces
 as the papers are hand-
 ed in. 4/10 Watch your spelling
 and punctuation

The effect of negative marking of this type, endured for a period of years, is almost entirely depressive. This is particularly true with the less able children in grammar schools, who frequently end up with a failure complex at least as intense as that frequently ascribed to those unfortunate enough to fail their eleven-plus examination. I am sure that most good grammar schools are now more aware of their responsibility in the education of their C- and D-streams than they were even ten years ago.¹ Nevertheless, many pupils' experience of marking is of an activity of the teacher which is largely destructive – which, in effect, amounts to telling the pupil repeatedly that he's not much good. And if you go on telling him this, he generally believes you in the end. If the effect of such treatment on a relatively able child is disastrous, how much more so when the same formalistic approach is applied in the marking of work by children of average ability. Imagine, for example, the child who wrote the passage opposite receiving the work back – or, better, imagine this happening week after week for several years.²

It is hardly necessary to labour this. It will be noted, however, quite apart from the depressive effect of finding one's honest efforts massacred in this way, that the marking totally misses the point. This is a very commendable effort by a second-year child of secondary modern C-stream ability – there is a real attempt to grapple with experience and a quite accurate visualisation of the scene. Negative marking thus obscures the most significant feature of the whole piece, and illustrates precisely the approach the Newsom Report was condemning when it pointed out that 'teachers whose sole standard is correctness can dry up the flow of language and shackle creative and imaginative writing before it is under way'.

★

Approval of what a child has done may easily be given, and received, as a 'reward'. But it need not be so. Approval is an entirely rational complement of what is rightly done, and to express approval is to do no more than justice. This *recognition* is, as justice, *due* to the person. To learn to receive it reasonably is an intrinsic part of education. Not to receive it when it is due is not only to be reasonably disappointed and discouraged but to be deprived, so to speak, of a growing point. A teacher may be cautious about offering rewards; he should have no hesitation in offering recognition.

L. A. Reid³

In all fairness, I ought perhaps to acknowledge the obvious – that formal marking of the traditional type has not always had the disastrous

¹ Since this must in part be ascribed to the challenge offered by new types of school, there is perhaps something to be said for competition after all.

² Once again, James Hemmings' comments on the moral effect of failure at school are significant: *vide supra*, p. 161, footnote.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 147.

effects described. Where it has in fact led to perceptible improvement, however, I prefer to ascribe this to the virtues of the individual teacher concerned, rather than to those of the method. If the teacher has succeeded in making his criteria meaningful to the children it may well succeed, and if his normal attitude to them is one of friendly encouragement, even negative marking need not be depressive. One cannot help feeling, however, that teachers who have achieved thus much could have accomplished more had their marking set out to indicate primarily what was right, good, vivid, accurate, sincere, interesting or lively, rather than to focus attention merely on what was incorrect, slipshod, slangy and so on. To draw the child's notice to positive virtues is to provide better motivation for improvement and to inculcate more meaningful standards of endeavour.

Children's evident interest in marks may generally be taken to reflect the fact that, in a competitive system, their performance mark vis-à-vis those of their peers is the only recognition of their effort that the system provides. I doubt whether they are 'naturally' as interested in comparisons as is often supposed. What they require is some assurance of their own worth: they need to feel that *they're good*, not merely that *they're better than someone else*. Often too, the actual marks themselves seem to distract attention from essentials; they encourage the child to regard the assessments as final, instead of examining the underlying standards and criteria. The most common reaction of a pupil to whom an essay has been returned is to look at the last page and give a pleased smile or, perhaps more often, a shrug¹ – and then to *close the book*. The assumption is clearly that a process has reached its conclusion – the work has been written, and marked, and that's that. This remains true even if he is conscientious or well trained enough to do his spelling corrections before he closes the book. Indeed, even this time-honoured practice is now being seriously called in question, as it is very doubtful whether bad spelling can be improved merely by copying correct forms.

Here is our first point of attack. If marking is to be made meaningful, any – every – means must be employed to break down the assumption that critical assessment is the function and prerogative of the teacher alone. We must dispel for ever from the pupil's mind the idea that once something is written it is finished with. I referred earlier² to T. S. Eliot's strictures on Matthew Arnold for distinguishing too bluntly between the functions of criticism and creation. Once again this is very

¹ The teacher is well advised to pay close attention to this gesture particularly – a world of disappointment can be unobtrusively expressed in a shrug.

² *Vide supra*, p. 112.

relevant. We must aim to teach in such a way that the pupil can, to some extent at least, share in the process of evaluation, and can become alive critically as well as creatively.

For marking to be meaningful two further conditions must be fulfilled. In the first place the primary aim of marking should be encouragement rather than mere assessment: the former is a necessary part of teaching: the latter is the proper function of examinations. We want to ensure that the child is eager to do even better and there is no doubt that even limited success provides an enormous boost to his morale. To go on adjuring him to do *less badly* has the opposite effect. If one were to take over a depressed class and put an encouraging comment upon everything they wrote for several weeks, I am convinced there would be a marked improvement. This may seem an absurdly ingenuous assertion; the reader may feel that the children would rapidly 'get wise to' the fact that the teacher was putting 'Good' or 'Well done' on everybody's book and would become even more cynical and disillusioned than before. My experience of such classes would lead me to doubt this, however: the need of any really failure-conscious child for success is powerful enough to impede objective thinking of this kind; he will believe that he *has* achieved something because the achievement of success has become necessary in order to make life worthwhile – he will not see through such a simple device, because he does not want to see through it. Once again, it is worth emphasising that there are nearly as many children in the average grammar school who are in this position as there are in the secondary modern school.

In the second place, the criteria applied by the teacher must be meaningful to the child.¹ The 'assured standards' of Buber's 'old educator' are no longer assured, and frequently mean very little to the modern boy or girl. If, instead of their representing something completely external and unreal, the standards are to become autonomous, they need to be clearly based on the teacher's assessment, not of absolute qualities, but of

1. The general ability of the particular class;
2. The best level of production of which the particular child is capable.



¹ As a very practical corollary to this, I would add that there must be consistency of approach within a school or, at least a department. The marking symbols used must be the same and the syllabus of an English department is incomplete without a list of standard symbols together with some indication of which symbols (and hence, which technical demands) are appropriate at particular age – or ability – levels.

To return to the question I undertook to answer – ‘If we do not look for correctness, what do we look for?’ It is obviously impossible to list criteria that will be acceptable to everyone; the important thing is that whatever they are, they should be capable of communication to the child whose work is to be assessed. Those that seem to me of primary importance are implicit in what I have said in the earlier chapters of this book: deep concentration leading either to clear visualisation or recall of a scene or experience, or to an act of imaginative or empathetic projection; an emphasis on accuracy with, as a corollary, a consistent attack on vagueness, on any failure to develop ideas fully; the enjoyment of playing with ideas – gusto and zest in writing; where appropriate to the ability of the class, the effective use of atmosphere, theme sentences and the selection of significant detail or illustration; above all, an emphasis on the importance of writing from personal experience.

Instead of attempting to illustrate some or all of these – as I have already done – it may be helpful to look at a passage which has few if any of the qualities I admire. This was written by a fourth-year girl of good academic ability:

WINTER EVENING

Four o'clock, no-one about, no sign of life or existence, there is just the darkening evening. The once pale blue sky darkens, and the wispy clouds that once pranced the blue paths, now curdle and smudge the dulling face of the sky. The trees are ruffled by a playful breeze which seems to harden its tone, and change to a bullying wind, sweeping the timid leaves to the cold stones, and tossing litter through the air, like a dog, playfully tosses his bone. The blackened clouds loom above threatening the cowardly earth below, and suddenly chrystal drops crack through the morbid atmosphere and split as they reach the ground. Before long, thousands of these chrystal like liquids smere the pavements with their dulling wetness.

There behind the latticed window of the crouching cottage sits an old weather beaten gent. Cosily he sits with his thick warm sweater enclosing his well fed structure and his thick lined slippers clothing his stockined feet. The crafty draughts pierce through the tiny cracks of the notched doorway and lift the flowered curtains in a menacing gust, unfolding the frills. Wicked warm flames dance on the golden logs and charred coals, casting lonely shadows around the closed room. The winter nights have crept into the year, lead in by the golden autumn as if it were afraid. Boldly it strikes the night marring the gay pleasures of the folk around, and quietening the playful teasing of the previous springs effect. It acts like the fox cunningly forcing the rabbit to retreat to its hole.

By formal standards, this is a relatively competent piece of writing; perhaps not until it came to the ‘old weather beaten gent’ would the red pencil get really active, scribbling ‘slang!’ in the margin. I do not want to exaggerate its weaknesses out of all proportion – I would concede

that it bears the stamp of verbal ability, that 'curdle and smudge the dulling face of the sky' is a pretty good line. Quite apart from its slanginess, the word 'gent' seems very significant, however. The writer relaxed her superficial concentration and in that one word revealed her basic insincerity. She was writing an essay – an exercise in word-spinning – without any attempt at real involvement. One finds this impression supported by the proliferation of picturesque epithet and cliché-image: the facile prettiness of 'pranced the blue paths'; the repetition of the pathetic fallacy – 'playful breeze', 'bullying wind', 'timid leaves'; the horrid 'olde-worlde-ness' of the cottage with its 'notched doorway', 'flowered curtains', 'golden logs'. The figurative language is uniformly artificial and pays little respect to the objects described.

I may perhaps appear to be making rather a lot of one girl's failure to become interested in one particular essay topic. I quote it partly because it offers a clear contrast with other passages previously quoted, but also in order to emphasise the point that this kind of writing is relatively common – especially among girls. In the 1963 O level language paper of the N.U.J.M.B., one of the essay subjects was 'My Favourite Haunts'. One might have imagined that this offered scope for plenty of vivid, personal, concrete descriptive writing. Instead, the examiners were treated to a spate of quaint Victorian tapestries or rich pre-Raphaelite pastorals – 'cosy cottages', 'gurgling streams', 'gambolling lambs' and of course 'lush grass', were all over the place.

Significantly also, the passage quoted was an examination performance and it may be that children resort to this kind of thing for examinations as if these demanded a special kind of English. Certainly, writing of this type rarely occurs in classwork when the teacher's demands are clear and consistent. The response to these – provided they are specific, varied and exacting – goes some way to ensuring that the subject constitutes a real discipline. Thus even the technical 'tricks' dealt with in Chapters 6 and 7 are relevant. Whatever the subject of the lesson, however, the teacher is obliged to make sure that, before they begin to write, the children know what he is looking for in this particular piece of work. I have referred elsewhere to the fatuity of expecting young children to write vividly and correctly at the same time, and much bad writing by children is the result of their being faced with irrelevant or incompatible challenges – or with no clear challenge at all. This last may often be the case in an examination essay – where they flounder because they are unsure what is expected of them.

The reason for limiting the number of demands made is in order to concentrate their attention in a given direction, to meet one specific

challenge at a time. Obviously, if this approach is used, the teacher needs to make a wide variety of demands as the weeks go by so as to ensure that the different aspects of writing receive proper attention – thus he may require accuracy one week, effective metaphor the next, and so on.

This really explains my criticism of teachers who pay less attention to the preparation – the specific aim – of a lesson than to marking the work produced. It is ridiculous to spend a long time marking carefully a composition that has been set purely at random. If the children are ultimately to take some part in the critical evaluation of what they write – as I believe they often should – some such deliberate lesson-pattern as the following is desirable:¹

1. Stimulus and/or preparatory introduction by teacher, emphasising what he will be looking for.
2. The written response.
3. Recapitulation of criteria by teacher.
4. Preliminary comment and evaluation of the work by the children themselves – either of their own work or that of their fellows.
5. Final checking of their work and comments by teacher.

I shall conclude by looking at some more children's work, together with various comments they made on it. The range of work which offers opportunities for the kind of shared assessment activity I am anxious to promote is too wide to illustrate fully; all I can hope to do is to use a few examples to indicate the kind of performance one may reasonably expect from relatively able children. It seemed to me that these examples would be more significant if they were linked clearly to one or two specific topics already dealt with, and I have therefore chosen parts of a work sequence undertaken by the same second-year class as provided several of the illustrations for Chapters 6 and 7. These examples have an additional interest, for they represent some of the children's earliest attempts at self-criticism.

The two specific aspects I have chosen to illustrate are theme-sentences and descriptive technique. I should mention, however, that the class had been introduced to the idea of self-criticism in work of a more mechanical kind – for example, having 'wallowed in metaphors' for the first time, they had been asked merely to read their work

¹ Here, as elsewhere, if the general aim is heightened awareness, mere routine is to be guarded against. Flexibly used, however, lessons of the type outlined above cover a great deal more – and enable the teacher to assess much more – than mere writing ability. Careful listening and reasoning are also tested, and the teacher is often provided with a good indication of the effectiveness of his own teaching.

through, underlining or writing out the metaphors they had used.¹ Subsequently, the idea of discrimination was introduced by asking them to select the most effective² figurative language and comment upon it – much of this work was oral. It is important to make the first exercises moderately easy and mechanical. They become more interested because they can succeed – and at this stage limited and specific demands afford them the opportunity of really successful response.

The first series of illustrations show the children commenting upon the effectiveness of single paragraphs on a given key-sentence. These had been written after an introduction which stressed the need for unity of mood and theme, and which revised the ideas of selection and emphasis.³ After they had written their paragraphs, I reminded them briefly of the points stressed in the introduction and asked them to assess their neighbours' paragraphs. Their criticisms were to be based on answers to the following questions:

1. Is the mood sustained throughout?
2. Are the details well chosen to achieve this?
3. Do the words used help to emphasise the mood?

These questions were, of course, designed not only to develop their critical acuity but to provide me with a check on the adequacy of the initial explanation.

1. Gradually the heat became unbearable. The sun was beating down upon my back and my wet clothes stuck to my skin. Sweat was rolling down my face and my throat was parched. My hair hung down the back of my neck, so that it was hot and sticky. My lips were dried up and cracked and I kept licking them, but only to make them seem to dry up more quickly.

Comment by neighbour –

Mood: Yes the mood does run right through the paragraph e.g. hot and sticky.

Selection: Some of the details do help to create the correct mood, e.g. My throat was parched. . . .

Emphasis: Most of the details in this paragraph are clear enough.

2. The sun climbed to its zenith torturing my body with its blistering rays. The heat was getting intense so that I felt too lazy even to move. Gradually the heat was getting unbearable. The sultry air made me feel even hotter. Sweat poured off me. It was stuffy and suffocating.

¹ An example of this particular exercise was quoted on p. 128.

² The old basic criterion of *accuracy* was stressed so that they would not be tempted to single out images which merely 'sounded good'.

³ See Chapter 2.

Comment by neighbour –

I think that Richard keeps the mood all the way through. There are some good words 'torturing my body with its blistering rays'. He describes it instead of telling a story. I think that where he says 'Gradually the heat was getting unbearable' he should have put it at the beginning of the paragraph.

3. Gradually the heat became unbearable, as I lay underneath a shady palm tree. My leathered tongue longed for a drop of water and the air seemed to quiver before my eyes. The few plants I could see had withered up with the intense heat. As I looked up at the sun it seemed a golden glare in a very pale blue sky. Looking away I had to close my eyes for a second to clear the image that moved before my eyes.

Comment by neighbour –

The mood is mostly right through it. 'Intense heat' I think is good and also 'as I looked up at the sun it seemed a golden glare in a very pale blue sky'. The 'golden glare' bit is the part I like. The rest of the paragraph is moderate.

4. Gradually the heat became unbearable. Every minute the sun was getting higher. All the time we knew we were getting nearer to the danger zone of the planet Mercury, but we had to tramp on. Even our heat resistant suits stung the flesh of our legs as we walked.

Writer's comment on his own work –

I think it is not what you wanted and is too much of a story than a description.

The last example is quoted because of the significant comment: 'not what you wanted' suggests that the criteria he is applying are still very external to him and indicates a need for fuller and clearer explanation – in order, amongst other things, to eradicate any idea that a 'story' is somehow an intrinsically inferior art form.

After several exercises similar to that above, during which they also attempted criticisms of paragraphs on themes of their own choice, we sought to apply some of these critical techniques to narrative. The first narrative was set after little or no introduction except the reading of a couple of newspaper accounts of 'Hurricane Flora'.¹ Here is one passage fairly typical of those produced:

THE HURRICANE

In one moment the 140 miles an hour hurricane had transformed the stout bamboo huts into a crumpled pile of pathetic matchsticks. The trees had collapsed killing many people who had ventured out into the blinding hurricane. Then came the rain. Torrential rain 40 to 50 long drawn out hours. There was not a landmark left upright for miles around, the terrible hurricane and now the rain had either flattened them or submerged them completely. The only transport was by boat, or of course you could swim in polluted water.

¹ October 8th, 1963.

Then came the last straw, typhoid struck. One by one the population decreased, until there was but a scarce number of people starving, dying and living in complete squalor and poverty. So not more than four or five people lived in town. This was only part of the utter destruction of the hurricane.

This is poor stuff – thin, superficial, un-vivid. Occasionally, however, it is a legitimate teaching advice to frame a situation in such a way that the children make mistakes from which they can learn. The particular aim here was to show something of the deliberate and methodical preparation which is required in order to construct a vivid and satisfying narrative; the children needed to discover that you cannot just sit down and ‘pour out’ a story. The first critical lesson to be learned in this context was the perception that a condensed, generalised account created few pictures in the mind – it was difficult to imagine ‘The trees’, which had collapsed, ‘killing *many* people’, whereas we could have visualised one such incident quite clearly. In a sense, too, the first paragraph contained too many potential theme-sentences, none of which was adequately developed. The simple question – ‘From what the writer says here, can you really picture it?’ – is often sufficient to bring home the ‘unpicturesque’ quality of generalisation, and thus lead children to realise the evocative quality of the particular – of what I have called ‘significant detail’.

Discussion of their efforts on ‘Hurricane’ – together with the reading of one or two short passages of vivid, muscular narrative – established that, in order to do justice to a series of dramatic events, we needed to break them up, to think about them individually and to decide beforehand which aspects we wished to emphasise most strongly. This linked up naturally with previous work on single paragraphs and descriptive technique. What was needed now was another topic which should provide them with the opportunity to learn – this time from relative success, instead of failure – just how helpful a methodical approach could be. Three days later the world was shocked by the news of the dam disaster at Longarone in the Dolomite foothills.¹

I had intended to use any suitably dramatic news story for follow-up work, but it was only after hesitation that I decided to use this tragedy. Obviously, to make classroom capital out of human disaster, in order to achieve a minor improvement in the children’s writing, would be hard to justify: one is morally bound to ensure that sensibility is not, in fact, blunted by too frequent or casual treatment of such events. The question of increasing technical control has, however, much more than merely technical importance. I have repeatedly stressed the part English

¹ Extensively reported in the national press on Friday, October 11th, 1963.

work must play in the development of the individual through the extension of sympathy, and technique of the kind I have just been discussing – so far from being a mere ‘frill’ – ministers very potently to this extension. As I have pointed out elsewhere,¹ it is very hard to be involved in ‘humanity’, to imagine and feel for thousands, but selection of detail imposes upon the young writer the obligation to think about and feel such a tragedy as this in terms of its impact upon particular people. To split up the narrative into paragraphs, furthermore, is not under these circumstances a callous technical exercise, but in fact promotes closer focusing, and a deeper imaginative realisation of what tragedy means.² This seems vital; the frequency with which tragic events figure in the daily news often means that we become emotionally insulated.³

This time the introductory work and discussion were much more exhaustive. After reading one or two newspaper reports, we discussed the television coverage of the Longarone disaster. We then went on to decide on an outline so that, because the children knew precisely what they were trying to do at each stage of the account, they might do justice to the horror of the event. After discussion, it was decided that their accounts should deal with three distinct phases:

Life going on as usual before the disaster struck: theme – normality.

The moment of crisis: theme – panic and confusion.

The scene next morning: theme – desolation.

We felt that the horrific suddenness of the catastrophe could best be conveyed by employing a dramatic contrast of the type implicit in this plan.

I quote the first passage because it is a good example of partial understanding of the introduction. This will frequently happen where several demands are made on the children. If the introduction is really too long and too complicated the writing will probably be bad, but more often, as here, one part of the instructions will be grasped to the detriment of the rest. I laid a good deal of stress on the selection of details and this boy

¹ *Vide supra*, p. 75.

² Obviously, the use one makes of topics such as these will depend upon the age and ability of the class: with older children, instead of straightforward narrative accounts, we might require an exercise in imaginative projection or empathy – something on the lines, perhaps, of the passage on the feelings of the owner of a condemned house, Example 3, pp. 81–2.

³ All this may appear a somewhat plausible and sententious exercise in self-justification, but it illustrates one of the dilemmas of the English teacher: one cannot set out to explore real experience without being confronted, at unexpected moments, by situations that raise not merely technical but moral issues.

remembered it and applied it very successfully. He managed also to bring out the contrast quite effectively but he forgot to give sufficient strength to his key themes, as he himself realised when he read it through.

Example 1

A skinny dog scratched at the door and was kicked away by a scruffy boy. The dog whined for food, his ribs stuck out and his skin was bruised by the boys who kicked him as if he was a football. His hair was filthy with mud and leaves off the dirty pathway in the slum. His eyes were sticking out of his head and one stopped in the same place all the time. His tail had been cut off when a woman threw a carving knife at him. He was a mess.

An almighty roar filled the air like an atom bomb falling in the sea. The lights went out and people's shouts were drowned by the impact of a whole lake falling 880 ft. Some of the villagers slept on dreaming of things that they had done. The people who were near the dam ran in confusion, some even ran towards the huge wave enveloping the surrounding districts. The people who were on the mountain side saw the water smash the villages. Houses were like paper and were soon changed into pulp. It was all over in a few hours.

Morning came, a bedspread floated down the river with a top of a man's pyjamas on it. Roots of an oak were sticking out of the mud like fingers of an overgrown witch. The mud was a soft brown, green and yellow carpet which covered everything.

The dog which I had seen before was half submerged in the mud. He stared at the sky as if to say 'why can't I have a soul?' Its hair was matted with mud. Its ears were clogged up with it. It slowly began to sink. Soon it was gone and it caused a few bubbles to rise. The disaster was over.

Despite the lack of any very explicit theme in the first paragraph, we have come a long way from those first superficial efforts. The writer does not make the dog as effective as it might have been, but he certainly tries – there is no throwing away the idea in one sentence. In fact, the quite original idea of using this detail in both the opening and conclusion serves to give the whole a strong shape. We might say that he had become slightly intoxicated with significant detail – the sentence about the dog, 'He was a mess', verges perilously upon humorous understatement. Nevertheless, some of the detail is remarkable in its economical evocation, particularly, I think, the opening of the third paragraph.

When the writing had been completed, the class were asked to recall, as fully as possible, the points made in the introduction. When all of these had been covered, they were asked, during homework, to answer a series of questions similar to those previously used about each paragraph they had written.

Several of the narratives, though noticeably longer than the earlier efforts on 'Hurricane', were superficial. For the less able children, or for

the less mature, narrative seems to mean little more than a series of things people do; this is often accompanied by an impulse to give everyone in the story a name – another sign of immaturity. There is a significant correlation between this kind of writing and a liking for the works of Miss E. Blyton, and certainly nearly all the pupils I have known who write in this way have been girls. It will be sufficient to quote the opening of one such effort. It is a pretty depressing one, but the writer's comment gives one some hope.

Example 2

Anna Demuchi and her small son Antonius were busy picking grapes in the small vineyard above their house. Her daughter was looking after the four small children of Geta Viskinski Voloski, a widow, who was also picking grapes.

Anna looked up as she heard a noise like roaring thunder probably a storm she thought. She looked out of the window and screamed as she saw a great deluge of water bearing down from the mountain the dam that the experts had said would hold would burst! Geta also had seen it and had run next door to warn Viskinski. They dragged her out of bed and rushed up the slope behind the house they had just reached safety when Viskinski thought of her children who had gone to stop with their Aunt who lived right in the path of the surging water. Viskinski was hysterical and trying to run down the mountain but she was too late the town was swept away and her children with it. . . .

Writer's comment on the first paragraph –

I don't think the feeling comes over clearly because it doesn't give the impression that it is a perfectly normal day as there is only one grape harvest every year and people don't pick grapes every normal day. The words are not very effective because there are none to suggest a mood. . . .

As I said, this girl's comment upon her effort is a hopeful one, and I have frequently found that some of the relatively weaker writers are particularly conscientious critics. Obviously one needs to be careful to stress the need for constructive criticism, or there is a danger that the unsuccessful writer will merely be saying 'I'm no good' in a variety of disguised ways. Once again, one must provide opportunity for successful achievement even with quite able children. The next example is a piece of mediocre writing followed by a ponderous but impressive attempt at evaluation. There are obviously weaknesses about the passage which the writer is unaware of but this is natural at such an early stage – one will hope that a very laudatory comment on his self-criticism will encourage him to do better all round next time.

Example 3

The day before the dam disaster life in the small country villages was normal. The atmosphere was peaceful not a care in the world. Cats miowed

lazily by the waters edge. A cool midday breeze pushed the ripples gently across the lake. In every respect life was the same as usual.

The next day huge rocks came roaring down the mountainside echoing throughout the land. A tremendous explosion occurred when the rocks struck the water. Millions of tons of water came smashing over the dam top completely destroying everything in its path. People screamed as the huge wave swept away the houses. Furniture, clothes, animals and people were doomed. Nothing could stop this immense wave. In a matter of seconds the water conquered the village of Longarone. In the distance bodies were seen being swept away by the water. As the water disappeared people searched the thick mud and slime. Bodies partly visible in the mud and under rubble. One particular lady was digging away at the mud with a spoon. She refused to move until soldiers came to her rescue. Rescuers dug but found nothing.

As the news spread throughout the world, relief parties and supplies came in a matter of hours. Food, drinking water, clothes, bandages, plasters and medicines. Doctors, nurses, survivors helped in every way possible to free the trapped villagers. Soldiers had the unpleasant task of counting the dead people. The impression it gave me was chaos and destruction.

Self-criticism

In the first paragraph the mood of peacefulness carries on throughout the whole paragraph. It comes out clearly. i.e. Cats mowed lazily by the waters edge. In this paragraph 'A cool midday breeze pushed the ripples gently across the lake. Cats mowed lazily by the waters edge' helps create the mood of peacefulness. I think the details in the first paragraph are clear but not very interesting.

The words used help to emphasise the mood. Those that do are peaceful, lazily, gently and same as usual.

The mood of confusion and chaos carries on throughout the 2nd paragraph. The mood of confusion and chaos comes over clearly because of the descriptive words. The selection of details help to create the right mood. The details are clear and interesting. The words used are good words because they help to create the mood. Those words are Roaring, echoing, tremendous, explosion, smashing, destroying, doomed and slime.

The mood of the last chapter is sorrow and pity and the mood comes over clearly. The mood of sorrow and pity runs right through the paragraph.

Yes the selection of details help to create the mood. The words in the paragraph help to emphasise the mood.

The last example of this series is a particularly interesting demonstration of the support afforded by technique.¹ This was written by the same boy as wrote the first passage quoted (on 'Hurricane', p. 228).

Example 4

The bell in the belfry of the church rang loudly deafening the sleepy town of Longarone. A drunk wended his way home through the narrow winding

¹ I do not wish to mislead the reader into thinking that the startling difference is entirely due to the provision of a method of approach. They were allowed a good deal more time for this exercise than for that on 'Hurricane Flora' – but this was largely because they had learnt that by splitting the subject up they could find a great deal more to say. Had more time been given to the first exercise, however, they would have written very little more: after they had worked for less than an hour nearly all were convinced that they had exhausted the subject.

streets, as he did every night except the Sabbath, to his little hut on the outskirts of the town. But this time he did not make it, he lay half asleep in a doorway a few hundred yards away from where he lived in squalor wasting his money on the drink that had been the ruin of him. And in a cart filled with hay, a few feet away from him, a poor homeless child slept. The child regarded the cart as a luxury for he usually slept in doorways huddling to keep out of sight of the town policeman who would be doing his normal nightly rounds of the sleeping town, as he had done for many years, seeing only the beggars and suchlike and this night was no exception.

Then suddenly like a bird flying out of the sky a giant wave of water rushed through the town with such force that vehicles were swept into the air and bounced back again into the water. By now the first houses had begun to crumble, a dark crack in the wall first, and then some more. Then the foundations gave way and the whole house collapsed into the dark, muddy water. A mare galloped in front of the water trying to beat it and get to safety. But then she was tossed by a wave, bounced back on to the water and then crushed against a falling tree.

A little girl screamed, looking for its parents who were probably buried beneath the rubble of their house. The child ran over a rooftop of a flooded house trying to escape the rising flood water. Then the water came pouring over the roof and the child screamed again, desperate for help. Now the water was around her knees and then she spluttered and was dead, her body lost in the murdering water.

The bright morning sun rose on Longarone as usual, but the town was not normal. The whole town had been flattened like a pack of cards. The most prominent building in the town, the church, was but a heap of rubble and stone. The high altar was exposed to the light, it was the only bit still recognisable. In the main street the scene was just as sorrowful. Round where there had once been a cafe, pots and pans of all descriptions lay about, some still contained food, their handles bent, with dents and cracks and pieces chipped out. Down by the outskirts of the town nothing except mud and stone was to be seen. It had been the first place to be hit and therefore had stood the full force of the water. A man sat on a solitary rock, one of the few survivors, he had been bringing his herd of sheep in from grazing on the hills. He had lost his family and now he sat on a rock, not twitching a nerve. The news of the disaster had crushed his brain and he had sat there for about five solid hours, not batting an eyelid, not moving until two helpers came and walked him away. As he walked he still looked back on the desolate rubble of what was once his house.

In his comments on this the author felt that his paragraphs had managed to convey the right mood, but interestingly – and I think correctly – was critical of the first sentence of all: ‘... the first sentence is wrong in saying the bell “deafened” the town.’

His comment on the last paragraph was also worth discussing: ‘The words in this paragraph are a bit vague except for the words in the detail of the man on the rock.’

He was being a little hard on himself here, but he has certainly been able to see what was the most effective part. The use of the word ‘vague’ is interesting, in showing that the first fundamental criterion – of accuracy – has not been left behind.

Since the illustrations hitherto have shown children's early and rather mechanical attempts at criticism, it may be helpful to conclude the series with an example of the freer approach which children of the same academic ability are able to adopt a year or so later, by which time practice has bred confidence and a certain flexibility. The passage, once again, is a narrative one, being the first chapter of a novel about a lad who ran away to sea. I do not propose to comment upon it, preferring to leave this in the capable hands of the girl who sat next to the writer.¹

Example 5

THE YOUNG SAILOR

Chap. I.

It was a cold wintry night in the year 1601. A small boy of about ten sat huddled in the corner of an attic. Outside the wind raged, blew down chimney pots, whistled through window-frames, and howled through loose floor-boards. The rain ran down the window-pane in rivulets and seeped into the already damp attic. A flash of lightning lit the room showing the boy who hid his face with his hands in his fear. The storm subsided and only the drip-drip of the last drops of rain could be heard.

The day dawned bright and warm, for the time of the year. Jack Sullivan was already up and working hard. He carried a wooden bucket over his arm. He put it down at the side of the pump and proceeded to fill it with water. On his way back to the house he met the local farmer who, like himself, was always early out of bed. He had a friendly word for everyone and especially for young Jack. Jack was a happy lad by nature but his brightness had been suppressed and now he had to force himself to smile. The farmer was his only friend, the one to whom he always took his problems, the one to whom he told his secrets and ambitions.

Having said goodbye to the farmer he began to walk along the lane towards his master's house. His footsteps were heavy for he dreaded going back. He had taken far too long already to fetch the water. He remembered what had happened the last time he was late. Still he bore the marks of that occasion, when that brute had whipped him. At this he broke into a run taking care not to spill any water. He left the water outside the kitchen when he arrived at his so-called home, and then began his long hours of drudgery in the work-shop.

The work-shop was a dark, musty-smelling affair. It had only one small window which allowed a minimum of light to penetrate the gloom. Here Jack twisted the hemp into strands, which his master made into rope. His hands were red and blistered from the long hours of toil and his eyes grew weary from the lack of light. To pass away the time he thought of what he would do if he were free, free from being his master's slave and labourer. Free from drudgery and cruel toil.

Assessment by her neighbour:

The first chapter is extremely good, with very vivid descriptions which bring the scenes alive to the reader. The boy's feelings are described fully and are very detailed, making him alive to the reader. Examples of vivid description are: (1) 'The rain ran down the window-pane in rivulets.'

¹ Also a girl. Both were of good academic ability, and in the last term of their third year.

(2) 'His brightness had been suppressed and now he had to force himself to smile.'

(3) 'His long hours of drudgery in the work-shop.'

(4) 'musty-smelling affair.'

No description in this passage is left un-noticed and all are vivid and original.

One sentence contains rather repetitional possessive adjectives:-

'A flash of lightning lit the room showing the boy who hid *his* face with *his* hands in *his* fear.' I think that perhaps she should cut out one or more of these.

In conclusion, I would emphasise that the purpose of the foregoing illustrations is not to assert that these represent any particularly remarkable standard. Their purpose is merely to give some indication, however slight, of the extent to which children may be encouraged to participate in the work of evaluation. Methods of encouraging this must vary,¹ and any fixed routine must be avoided, but to debar children from making any such attempts is to deprive them of a most valuable growing point. Self-criticism of the kind illustrated is closely related to what would normally come under the heading of comprehension work, and I would argue that formal comprehension work of the traditional type is rendered much more meaningful if provision is made for it to run parallel to work of the kind I have advocated.

It is not only the children who benefit, however. While I am not holding up this method as marking a new golden age (sans marking) for the teacher, it may in fact partly lighten his burden. But more important than this, the teacher who invites his pupils to share with him the task of evaluation will almost inevitably find that his teaching becomes tauter and more clearly focused as a result, and that his understanding of the children's difficulties, and hence his ability to help them, are notably increased.

¹ To mention only one small but significant variation on the method outlined previously: the teacher's assessment need not regularly *follow* that of the children. A quick check through their books may enable him to note certain weaknesses which he can best underline not by comment, but by asking them questions that are designed to lead them to discover the weaknesses *for themselves*. In this way marking is made, once again, a *teaching* device.

Appendix

(pp. 152-160 of Chapter 19, 'The Humanities', in *Half Our Future*, H.M.S.O.)

A. ENGLISH

The use of language in thought and in communication must enter into every part of the curriculum. English, as a subject primarily concerned with care for words, clearly has a distinctive contribution to make, yet it is doubtful if that contribution is at present as effective as it might be. Of the general sincerity and frequent skill of the teaching there can be no question; real illiteracy in the formal sense is comparatively rare. But there seems a very general feeling that the ordinary boy and girl should leave school with a better command of English than they in fact appear to possess. Have aim and method in English teaching kept pace with what we know about young people and how they learn? And does English teaching take sufficient account of the relation between school and the world beyond? For the pupils are a product of both and so is the command of language which they need for maturity.

The teachers of English tend to think of their subject from three different but related points of view: as a medium of communication, as a means of creative expression, and as a literature embodying the vision of greatness. They are trying to offer all pupils the freedom of all three, and rightly do not think of the weaker boys and girls as living in a kind of nature reserve, debarred by lack of ability from the great things of our civilization. That way lies apartheid. But in practice many of the weaker pupils never seem to reach the point at which real English begins. Some teachers, including many who have never been trained for teaching English, give them a watered down version of what they remember from their own grammar school experiences. Much use is made of text books providing endless exercises in comprehension, composition and the like. There are rough books and best books, the former filling up more quickly than the latter with laborious writing. Commas are inserted, spelling corrected. Occasionally free composition produces a shapeless mess in which the memory of many televised Westerns often seems to be still riding the range of the pupil's mind. Poetry is 'done': drama may occur on Friday afternoon and towards Christmas. . . .

When handled with competence and conviction, the traditional teaching pattern can enlist interest and encourage progress. But it is too seldom about anything of much potential importance to the pupil; where there is little to talk about, conversation or discussions cannot flourish. What is learned today tends to be forgotten tomorrow; it is not applied to other subjects. Nor, though plenty of work seems to be going on, do teacher or pupil seem to expect much real progress. There is little pleasure or respect for skill.

The weaker pupils in the third or fourth year do not seem to mind too much, even where, as is not uncommon, the text books seem a tired survival from the junior school. But good humoured tolerance often passes into a somewhat cynical attitude which may in turn become definite rejection, when reading means little to these pupils, and writing less. What they already have of either seems enough for their needs later on. And when it comes to speech, there is often a deep-seated corporate resistance to the very notion of 'talking posh'.

But the pupils are not merely a product of school. Their standards in speech, as in much else, reflect those of their families. They have heard much about the

outside world from older relatives already in jobs, as well as from newspapers, magazines, the cinema and television. The last appears particularly potent, if only because so many particularly of the less able pupils have imbibed so much of it. Like the other mass media it tends to mirror and over-emphasize certain aspects of our society which are at variance with the values of school – not for nothing is the screen schoolmaster usually a buffoon. No wonder if school is regarded as something to be tolerated.

Yet we must not forget all the ordinary pupils who happily make good progress. Nor are boys and girls as grown-up as they would like us to think; many a young man has left coffee-bar, fruit machine and girl friend to play, with or without a younger brother, with the toys of childhood. And under their veneer of sophistication these young people know they are not yet properly equipped to face the outside world. But their misgivings are inarticulate. They need help and will accept it if this can be done without loss of face.

The overriding aim of English teaching must be the personal development and social competence of the pupil. And of all the different aspects of English, speech has by far the most significant contribution to make towards that development. Inability to speak fluently is a worse handicap than inability to read or write. Though boys and girls learn to speak long before they go to their first school, every school carries a major responsibility for its pupils' speech. This is not essentially a matter of accent or pronunciation, although in a mobile society it is realistic to recognize that the pupils who have no alternative to a strictly local vernacular may be at a disadvantage in later life. But far more important is the need to ensure that they can speak easily, clearly and with interest, and have something to talk about. Personal and social adequacy depend on being articulate, that is, on having the words and language structures with which to think, to communicate what is thought, and to understand what is heard or read. The pupils need in school experiences which will not only help them to find the words but also give them confidence to express them. Any definition of literacy for them must include an improved command of spoken English, particularly in understanding argument and in trying to put a point of view. *Side by side with speech comes its partner listening; conversation presupposes both, but too few pupils ever learn to listen carefully, to the teacher or to each other.* Here the teacher's example is all-important; when he teaches, is it all monologue or a reasonably balanced dialogue in which the pupils get a fair chance; is he interested in what they have to say?

Real communication begins when the words are about experience, ideas, and interests which are worth putting into language. The teacher can initiate and encourage; he cannot do the work for the pupils, but he can suggest work that is clearly worth doing and help them to do it. Only he can find out what interests his pupils, and he must begin, though not end, with that. The initial experience will be that of home, school and the immediate background, though young people's curiosity will soon take them beyond that. There is so much to discuss, not only local and domestic questions, but also such themes as fashion, death, the rate for the job, marriage, football, abstract art, the prospect of human survival, or bringing up children. Hobbies such as fishing, vintage cars, and aircraft all offer possibilities which point beyond their own first beginnings – for discussion will not satisfy for long.

Books, magazines and the library are, or should be, there to help. The library ought to be the power-house of words and ideas: it is the more regrettable that large numbers of secondary schools – three-fifths of the modern schools in our survey – are still seriously deficient in library accommodation. Even where facilities are good, it requires resource and persistence to contrive that the less able pupils really benefit from them. It seems likely that there is often a notable drop in the quality of books available to many pupils when they move from the

primary to the secondary school, partly because there is a tendency for schools to cater most fully for their ablest pupils, and partly because it is not easy to provide, at least for the older pupil of really limited reading ability, books which are sufficiently simple and yet appropriately adult in content and vocabulary. The latter problem becomes even more acute when the pupils leave school. Even with the large numbers of boys and girls to whom the mechanics of reading present no serious difficulties, there is a need to enlist interest and to establish reading habits which will persist beyond school. Valuable co-operation exists in some areas between schools and public libraries, and deserves wider extension. Certainly it is not enough merely to persuade pupils to acquire a public library ticket, nor simply to insert 'library' periods into the school time-table.

The library, fully equipped and used, has much to offer. There are paper backs, books of reference, and periodicals about anything from railways to home-making. Assignments on topics appropriately related to the pupils' interests and experience, yield, as well as information, the pleasure of working seriously on one's own. The results may not be wonderful at first, but the excitement of making discoveries and advancing is catching; the pupils will not be unaffected by the gradual enlarging of their powers which will follow. But much will always depend on the individual pupil; every pupil is an unknown country which the teacher approaches like a water diviner, and only when he touches the springs of interest will language begin to flow.

Seeking information is one aspect of the use of books. Techniques of reading remain important, not least when the pupil has nominally learned to read. Practice in slow, careful reading, practice in rapid reading, *work (much of it going deeper than traditional 'comprehension' questions) to link reading with speaking and writing can all help*; good reading aloud by a teacher may be much appreciated by the class. In the long run quality of reading usually depends upon will and interest. Many adults manage quite happily with little reading and less writing; the pupils know it, even though they also will accept that one cannot really go very far in contemporary life without either. In a world where the spoken word is so much more important than it was, we cannot assume that all our pupils will take reading or writing seriously unless we show them (rather than preach) the value of both. This means taking account once again of the pupils' background and interests – and also of their personal history; some, particularly of the weaker ones, associate reading and writing with six or seven years of continuous failure, and these salvage cases are the most difficult of all. Yet even at fourteen it is not too late to make a fresh start, provided that the start really is fresh; it is useless to go on boring the pupils of this age with books from the primary school, and one remembers the story of the young man of nearly fourteen, given up by his teachers as a hopeless illiterate, who ran a successful betting book under cover of his children's primers; when challenged, he is alleged to have replied: 'You don't think I can be bothered with all that muck.'

Given a basic literacy, the work in the later part of the school life may be increasingly concerned with the use of literacy: having learned, in some degree, how to handle words, the pupils have to be helped to learn now not to be handled by them. They need not merely to read, but to read with increasing sensitivity. This may require more attention to what pupils read at their own level, to help them formulate their own responses in words, and so be in a better position to criticize for themselves. Work of this kind, in relation to popular magazines and newspapers and advertising, is to be found in the schools but needs to be done more widely and systematically.

Nor should this more perceptive approach to reading be confined to popular journalism or what the pupils may voluntarily seek for themselves. All pupils, including those of very limited attainments, need the civilizing experience of

contact with great literature, and can respond to its universality, although they will depend heavily on the skill of the teacher as an interpreter. Sympathetically presented, literature can stretch the minds and imaginations of the pupils, and help to illumine for them, in wider human terms, their own problems of living. In so difficult a task the teacher will need a greatly extended range of books from which to choose, and all the help which professional readers and actors on records and radio and television can give. Indeed, in all its work in speech and reading and writing, the English department will have special need of these aids and of others such as tape recorder and film, as both sources of material and methods of teaching.

Here we should wish to add a strong claim for the study of film and television in their own right, as powerful forces in our culture and significant sources of language and ideas. Although the study of these media has for some time been accepted in a small number of schools as an important part of the curriculum, in the majority of schools they are used only as visual aids for the presentation of material connected with other subjects. Again, making a film is frequently seen as an interesting and unusual practical activity especially for the less academically gifted child; film and television clubs may be organized after school hours for the showing of feature films or informal discussion of evening programmes: all these ways of using film and television are valuable and constructive, and their extension is commended elsewhere in this report. The most important and most general use of these media, however, as major means for the mass communication of cultural experiences, is not generally dealt with in schools any more than it is in colleges or universities. Little attention is paid to the degree to which film and television enter into and influence the lives of our pupils and to these media as legitimate means for the communication of personal experience alongside literature, music and painting.

The culture provided by all the mass media, but particularly by film and television, represents the most significant environmental factor that teachers have to take into account. The important changes that take place at the secondary stage are much influenced by the world offered by the leisure industry which skilfully markets products designed for young people's tastes. The media help to define aspirations and they offer rules and models. They not only supply needs (and create them) but may influence attitudes and values. Little as yet has been effectively undertaken in schools in the way of offering some counter balancing assistance. We need to train children to look critically and discriminate between what is good and bad in what they see. They must learn to realize that many makers of films and of television programmes present false or distorted views of people, relationships, and experience in general, besides producing much trivial and worthless stuff made according to stock patterns.

By presenting examples of films selected for the integrity of their treatment of human values, and the craftsmanship with which they were made, alongside others of mixed or poor quality, we can not only build up a way of evaluating but also lead the pupils to an understanding of film as a unique and potentially valuable art form in its own right as capable of communicating depth of experience as any other art form. Just as we have traditionally thought it important to broaden children's response to and experience of literature and music, so we must now offer a comparative education in the important and powerful visual media, both because these media at their best have much that is valuable to offer and simply because communication in the twentieth century is becoming increasingly visual. The making of films when allied to studies of this kind becomes a much more potent educational instrument. One of the difficulties in extending this work is the shortage of teachers equipped to tackle it. While there is a supply, even if inadequate, of specialist and other teachers with some training in literature, music, art and drama, there are very few teachers equipped to deal with the art

forms that most closely touch the boys and girls of this report. We are glad to note that some training colleges have begun to respond to this challenge by offering courses in film both as major and minor elements in a course.

English comes within the sphere of the liberal arts for the pupils covered by this enquiry. It is not always easy to remember this; and yet, where there is real progress, such things as colour, feeling, tone, rhythm and the pleasure of language are surprisingly often playing a part. Heart is involved as well as head. It is of course within poetry and drama that the use of language goes deepest. Nobody should have to teach poetry against his will, but without it English will never be complete; poetry is not a minor amenity but a major channel of experience. The best starting point is likely to be the present, and, there is a great deal of contemporary verse to draw on, including ballads, songs and even limericks. How far the great poetry of earlier ages can be introduced with advantage only the teacher can say. Good reading by the teacher and the use (too rare in many schools) of records of spoken poetry will help the pupil to broaden his range; from listening to reading (in a group as well as individually) is a second step; from reading to writing is a third. In a number of schools very ordinary boys and girls are writing verse with pleasure, and the result, however simple, can be a moving and sometimes beautiful comment upon experience.

Though drama comes, by school tradition, into the English field, it is a creative art embracing much more than English. Perhaps its central element is, or should be, improvisation. It involves movement as well as words – that is one main reason why an outsize classroom or a small hall is really essential for English teaching. Drama can include miming and acting everyday situations or familiar stories, playwriting and play reading: all are relevant for the pupils covered by this enquiry, so long as we respect the limits of their understanding. It is useless, for example, to take them out of their depth in dramatic literature. If they read plays, they must be helped to realize that a play is not just the words in the book but much more besides.

Drama can offer something more significant than the day-dream. It helps boys and girls to identify themselves with well-known men and women of whom they have heard or read. By playing out psychologically significant situations, they can work out their own personal problems. Here is one way in which they can be helped to reconcile the reality of the world outside with their own private worlds. Once this begins, education has something on which to build. In short, drama, along with poetry and the other arts, is not a 'frill' which the less able can safely omit or relegate to a minor position on some Friday afternoons. Art is not an expensive substitute for reality. It is through creative arts, including the arts of language, that young people can be helped to come to terms with themselves more surely than by any other route.

It is a matter of some concern that the educative experience of drama in all its forms is too often, despite notable exceptions, restricted or denied to pupils. In school, the reason is often lack of suitable teachers, or of accommodation; outside, in many areas, there are too few opportunities for seeing high quality productions in the theatre. The stimulation of interest in the professional theatre, and encouragement to feel that it is part of their own, not an alien, culture, is particularly important for the older boys and girls, if they are not to miss this source of enrichment of their adult lives.

The best way to study writing is to practise it. Children only learn writing by writing, and they are best prepared to write about their own experiences. These free outpourings have much of the character of free verse: they are shapeless often, and lack control over words, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Gradually, improved writing develops. With some of our pupils it may never become completely mature or adult, but it can be encouraged by understanding teachers.

Teachers whose sole standard is correctness can dry up the flow of language and shackle creative and imaginative writing before it is under way. Precision and logical arrangement of ideas may well be sought but will not readily be found. Of the quotations (both extracts from longer pieces) which follow a headmaster writes: 'These would never have been written had correctness been our care. This boy of fifteen must only have bottled up his feeling for his pigeons. The quantity of output would have suffered and the quality of natural expression have been lost. The tenderness of the first passage, and the professional appraisal of the racing birds in the second, spring from real experience, creative enjoyment, and a pupil-teacher relationship that develops confidence.'

(a) (Part of a story, *A Pigeon to be Remembered*):

Every day David looked at his eggs to see if they were hatching, taking great care not to alarm the birds or touch the eggs. He soon got downhearted and thought his eggs would never hatch, and then one day to his great joy he saw his first baby pigeon, it sat there with its large eyes shut and all its golden down beautifying its otherwise ugly stature. He smiles as he shut the door of his small coop, and then suddenly he thought such a terrible thought that he ran almost in tears to his mother, and spluttered the words out, mother only one egg has hatched. A great smile came over his mother's face she said they don't hatch at ones. A great smile came over his face, and he told her of his little baby pigeon and asked her if she wanted to see it, no she said let his sleep now he will be tired.

(b) (From a description of preparing entries for racing):

It was about half past five, as I went down to the loft, the weather was fine, the wind was in the East. I looked out across the sky and said to myself I hope it stays as fine as this. After fiddling around in my pocket I finally found my key and opened the lock. The usual rumpus happened, My big black Cock Bird called Sulky Sam jumped on my shoulder, and started to pick my ears in his usual way, this earned him the name of Sulky Sam. I picked him up of my shoulder and looked at him carefully, he was one of six candidates, two of which would race. I looked into his eyes, and grunted contentedly, it was good and bright, and the core was beautifully white. I ran my hand gently down his side and felt his beautifully hard body and silky feathers. I then opened his wing and saw every flight and secondary in beautiful condition. I brushed my fingers down his wing and it squeaked and a lot of bloom came off it.

The next bird I came across was a hen and soon as I laid hands on I thought she seemed lively. She was in lovely condition, and had the things about her I was looking for. Her wattle was lovely and white and she handled beautifully. She was also sitting correctly. The Black and this hen were my candidates.

Writing is most likely to flourish in an atmosphere of ideas, discussion and reading, but it remains a difficult art and must be recognized as such. As far as the technicalities of English are concerned, balance is needed: spelling and punctuation must be taken seriously, but not with such ferocity that (as often happens) the pupil gives up trying. Spelling games do no harm if they are brief; a close link between writing and recent reading also helps. But while English spelling remains what it is, some even of our ablest pupils will always have trouble with it, and a few have spelling problems which call for treatment beyond the resources of the ordinary class teacher. Punctuation is best learned where there are ideas to express and points to make; full stops and commas should be friends, not enemies, if one has something to communicate. Correction involves a good many technical points beyond the compass of this report; not all mistakes need be scored through, the real problem is to touch the pupils' pride in giving the best that is in them. In reading and writing

alike, we might learn from the primary school practice of carefully checking the progress of individual pupils from stage to stage.

A wide and generous course of English should do much to prepare these pupils for life in an adult society; it is vocational in the best possible way. Such a course should provide a good foundation of workmanlike English, in that it will enable boys and girls in later life to read instructions or pass on messages, or write a letter, or jot down a record. The course will almost certainly have included practice in writing real letters, both personal letters, for example, to a member of the class in hospital, and more formal letters, such as those to firms asking for a leaflet or arranging a visit. Some special help, but not much, will be needed, if it is necessary to write letters of applications for employment; but those devastating make-believe applications in laborious, unreal letters should not often be needed. In any case too much must not be expected: the employer who wants his employees to be proficient in the written word will probably have to provide specialized linguist practice as part of the training given to new entrants, however well the school does its work. But these are not the only, or even the most important vocational aspects of English. In whatever job, and at whatever level of skill, the pupils may subsequently be working, they will all need to enter into effective relations with other people, if they are to work efficiently and happily. What they take with them from school in improved powers of speech, and in sympathetic insight into human relationships gained through literature, will be of great value to them here. To achieve success in their work, even in the narrowest sense, the boys and girls will require an experience of English that is far from narrow. To those objectors who say in effect 'Cut out the frills. You haven't the time, and the pupil hasn't the capacity, for more than the three Rs; this is the only way to deal with illiteracy', we repeat, as we have argued earlier, that such a restricted programme defeats its own ends.

English is distinctive in the curriculum in that it is both all-pervasive and yet has relatively little subject matter of its own. In the greater part of the pupils' work concerned with communication, with the acquisition of information and with the recording and evaluation of experience, English performs a service function to other subjects: it is the other subjects which supply the content, and the occasions for strengthening the pupils' resources in language. English must not be a subject narrowly ensphered within its own specialist boundaries; neither must it disappear altogether. It has distinctive experiences to offer: there will, for example, always need to be time-table periods in which the main emphasis falls on imaginative literature, and it is not easy to see how other subjects could take these over. The English lesson, too, is most likely to offer those opportunities which allow adolescents to write out of themselves what they are not always prepared or able to talk about: in the writing, deeply personal thoughts and feelings may be disguised or transmuted. Some of the least able pupils most need these opportunities.

But there are schools in which much, perhaps even most, of the speaking, reading and writing are taught through the medium of other subjects, or through projects of various kinds. Project work offers the incentive of a unified and challenging task, and also a means of bringing together diverse subjects, although projects cannot always cover all the important points; as the pupils get older, the various fields of knowledge are likely to be wider and more sharply defined than for younger pupils, regardless of ability. Whatever the pattern of organization, the content of other subjects provides the pupils in any event with a great part of their verbal education. Not only are they continuously using ordinary English which is common to all occasions; but they are acquiring a series of important special vocabularies which enlarge the field in which their minds are active. There is a particular literacy required in all subjects which should be carefully fostered by those who teach them. They are, perhaps, more likely to do this if sufficient

time is allowed for the purpose (as it often is not at present) and if the objective is thought of as a necessary part of what they are themselves teaching rather than as a contribution to 'English' which is somebody's else's business.

We feel considerable disquiet at the possible impact of examinations on English teaching. The proposed examination for the Certificate of Secondary Education is designed for boys and girls whose capacity varies from just below G.C.E. standard to a little below the middle of the ability range. Since the new examination will concern only those who stay on until sixteen, it is not likely at first to be taken by very many of the less able pupils. But when all have a five-year course there may be a real danger of distorted teaching as a result of too many candidates in the third and even fourth quarter of ability being put through unsuitable tests. We should not wish to see the main emphasis in Form 5C (and probably in 4C and 3C as well) being devoted to answering examination questions, instead of learning English. And, if we may judge by G.C.E. experience, preoccupation with examinations would tend to perpetuate a teaching pattern in which the whole form is treated as a single unit, at the expense of individual and group study.

To many good judges our suggestions will probably seem not so much unreasonable as Utopian. There are all the physical difficulties so often mentioned in this report. Even more serious is the shortage of trained teachers. Not many teachers without knowledge or training can teach the subject in the way that we have tried to suggest, however great their devotion and natural skill. And the supply of real specialists capable of making good heads of department or deputy heads, who would give a lead in the right direction, is drying up. Many schools have made great strides in English as in other subjects during the past decade, but today some of the best are full of misgiving. The quality of English teaching threatens to become worse; if it does, the weakest pupil will suffer most because the dominant pattern of teaching is always likely to be, for the non-specialist working without help, that which is set by the ablest groups and which is inappropriate for those with which we are concerned. We face, then, a crisis which is even now not sufficiently recognized, because it is a crisis of quality as much as of quantity. The challenge in teacher training is formidable. This is partly a matter of supply and organization, but it is more than that alone. It involves a wider recognition of what these pupils need. They deserve the best.

(The italics in this extract are the author's.)

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¹ Whether or not this is used as a textbook (as intended) it is a useful source for the teacher.

² The most comprehensive account of an approach similar to my own. Laban's principles are here translated into practical classroom terms – a translation sufficient for the needs of most teachers.

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Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments are due to the following for permission to reprint material quoted in the text:

The Literary Executor of A. S. J. Tessimond for 'The Man in the Bowler Hat' from *Voices in a Giant City* published by William Heinemann Ltd; Mrs Iris Wise and Macmillan & Co. Ltd for 'To the Four Courts, Please' from *Collected Poems* by James Stephens; Mrs Helen Thomas and Faber and Faber Ltd for 'Digging' from *Collected Poems of Edward Thomas*; Michael Baldwin and Longmans Green & Co. Ltd for 'Death on a Live Wire' from *Death on a Live Wire*; Robert Frost and Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc. for 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' from *The Complete Poems of Robert Frost* published by Jonathan Cape Ltd; Arthur Waley and George Allen & Unwin Ltd for 'Losing A Slave Girl' from *More Translations from the Chinese*, and 'The Cock Fight' and 'Song of the Men of Chinling' from *Chinese Poems*, translated from the Chinese by Arthur Waley; Erich Fromm and George Allen & Unwin Ltd for an extract from *The Art of Loving* published in hard-cover at 12/6 and paperback at 4/6; the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office for permission to quote in full the section on English from Chapter 19 of *Half our Future*; Chatto and Windus Ltd for permission to reprint in full the article 'I Write a Text Book' by A. D. Winterburn in *The Use of English*, Summer 1962, Vol. XIII, No. 4, and part of the article on 'The Teaching of Verse-Writing in Class' by J. T. Evans in *The Use of English*, Winter 1958, Vol. X, No. 2; the Executors of the James Joyce Estate and Jonathan Cape Ltd for three extracts from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; Henry Reed and Jonathan Cape Ltd for two stanzas from 'Naming of Parts' from *A Map of Verona*; J. N. Britton for his poem 'Lying Under a Tree'; The Clarendon Press, Oxford, for a poem from *Lore and Language of School Children* by Iona and Peter Opie; Theodore Roethke and Secker & Warburg Ltd, for 'Child on Top of a Greenhouse' from *Words for the Wind*; Miss E. J. Scovell and The Cresset Press for 'The Boy Fishing' from *The River Steamer*.

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JOHN F. WAY

Senior Lecturer in English
City of Birmingham College of
Education